

The Other Side of the American Revolution: A Look at the Treatment of Philadelphia Quakers during the Revolutionary War

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Philadelphia: “the asylum of the disaffected – the very air is Contagious and Its Inhabitants breathe Toryism.”

Quakers: “the Quakers in general are Wolves in Sheep’s Cloathing and while they sheld themselves under the pretext of conscientious Scruples, they are the more dangerous.”

John Lansing, Jr.¹

The traditional history lesson regarding the American Revolution recounts the stories of daring Patriots, men like Paul Revere who risked their lives for liberty. Also included are the men who signed the Declaration of Independence, such as Thomas Jefferson, the brilliant intellectual, and the first American President, George Washington, the great General and father of our democracy. The retelling of these stories emphasizes a new nation coming together to fight British injustices and create a society based on preserving individual liberty and freedom. American schoolchildren are left with the symbols of the first United States flag, said to be sewn by Betsy Ross, and the first Independence Day celebrations. These symbols instill the image of “one nation under God” into the minds of young Americans. However, not included in this picture are those citizens who lived in the American colonies before and during the Revolution, yet did not align themselves with the Patriot cause. One such group was the Quakers of Philadelphia. While others chose to side with the British, some Quakers, because of their religious beliefs, did not participate on either side of the Revolution.

Despite Revolutionary arguments for liberty and freedom and in retaliation for the Quakers' denial of the rebel government, Patriots chose to limit the freedoms of Philadelphia Quakers during the war. I argue that, aside from their religious differences, the way Quakers were treated was a result of deeper class and political issues that had been embedded into Philadelphia society years before the break with Great Britain. This paper will flesh out these matters by examining Quaker beliefs regarding war, their response to the Revolution, their treatment during its early years, all in the context of the class and political structures of the Revolutionary period. This paper is based on contemporary newspaper accounts, minutes from the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania, and the diary of Quaker wife Elizabeth Drinker to pinpoint the problematic relationship between Philadelphia Quakers and the Revolutionary government.

The British attempts to tax the American colonies following the French and Indian War (1756-1763) proved to be the catalyst that led colonists toward a split from the Kingdom. One Philadelphian, John Dickinson, wrote in 1767 that "taxation by the British Parliaments was an unconstitutional denial of the colonists' 'natural rights.'"² Immediately, colonists began to protest what they saw as injustices and adopted the rhetoric that the British Parliament was depriving them of their personal freedom. A period of uncertainty began during which the Philadelphia Quakers were undecided as to the proper course of action. In *The Quakers and the American Revolution*, historian Arthur J. Mekeel notes that Quaker merchants

were torn between opposition to British colonial policy which they considered unjust and unwise, and grave apprehension as to the measures being undertaken in retaliation. They feared that the result of the latter would be separation from the mother country and political upheaval in the colony, accompanied by bloodshed and economic ruin.³

The confusion of the Quaker merchants mirrored that of the rest of the Quakers, also called the Society of Friends. While the merchants' apprehension about violent measures against Britain may have been due to economic and trade interests, the Quaker faith prohibited military action of any kind, thus central to their reactions to Revolutionary politics were their pacifist beliefs.⁴

As escalation mounted in Philadelphia the Patriots began preparing for war and the creation of a new government. Given these efforts

the Quakers felt that it was imperative that they issue a formal proclamation outlining their beliefs. Many Quakers were prominent political leaders, and the Friends' leadership wanted to ensure that all followers held true to their religious principles. Thus, they produced "The Testimony of the People Called Quakers" after their Meeting of January 24, 1775. As recorded by the clerk, James Pemberton, the "Testimony" proclaimed that it was the duty of all Quakers to refrain from participating in radical politics, which he called "destructive of the peace and harmony of civil society."⁵ The published "Testimony" also included "An Epistle from the Meeting for Sufferings," recorded by John Pemberton, who used very strong religious language and quoted Bible passages to reiterate to Quakers their higher religious duties. Pemberton wrote,

we therefore earnestly beseech and advice . . . to consider the end and purpose of every measure to which they are desired to become parties, and with great circumspection and care to guard against joining in any for the asserting and maintaining our rights and liberties, which on mature deliberation appear not to be dictated by that "wisdom which is from above, which is pure, peaceable, gentle, and full of mercy and good fruits," James iii. 16.⁶

Furthermore, John Pemberton reminded Quakers "constantly to remember, that to fear God, honour the King, and do good to all men, is our indispensable duty."⁷ Clearly, by January of 1775, the leaders of the Philadelphia Society of Friends had decided their position. This stance placed them in opposition to the political body that was preparing for conflict with Great Britain.

Not surprisingly, this did not endear the Friends to Philadelphia's Revolutionaries, who labeled anyone not in support of the cause for war "disaffected."⁸ Specifically, they opposed the Quakers because they saw their alliance to the King as loyalty to Great Britain's politics, not the product of their religious principles. While some Quakers were Loyalists and later fought with British troops in America and even returned to England with them, a large number of Philadelphia Quakers attempted to remain peaceable.⁹ However, as Philadelphia radicals mobilized the city for war, they called for support from all male citizens to bear arms and all female citizens to provide materials for bandages, which the Quakers did not do. This visible lack of participation, even though it was based on their religious beliefs, became problematic. As a result of their "disaffection" and the high

emotions of the radicals preparing to fight, Philadelphia Quakers became targets of mob violence.¹⁰ After the first battles were fought at Lexington and Concord in April 1775, the situation became even more precarious for Philadelphia Quakers when the radicals installed a new government and began to limit the freedoms of anyone who opposed the war.

On January 20, 1776, the Quakers responded to this turmoil by issuing another statement. This testimony renewed the principles of the Ancient Testimony of 1696. The Ancient Testimony stated, as recorded by John Pemberton,

It hath ever been our judgment and principle, since we were called to profess the light of Christ Jesus, manifested in our consciences unto this day, that the setting up, and putting down Kings and governments is God's peculiar prerogative; for causes best known to himself; and that it is not our business to have any hand or contrivance therein; not to be busy bodies above our station, much less to plot and contrive the ruin, or overturn any of them, but to pray for the King and safety of our nation, and the good of all men; that we may live a peaceable and quiet life, in all godliness and honesty; under the government which God is pleased to set over us.¹¹

Interestingly enough, they chose to reiterate their belief that only God could install kings and governments at the same time they were being targeted for Toryism. However, it is doubtful that the distinction between following a king of God's choosing or merely following a king made any difference to the mob groups or radical politicians.

Another interesting point regarding this second testimony was the difference in language from the first. In the January 1775 testimony, the Quaker leadership directed their principles to other Quakers, admonishing them to follow the proper behaviors and codes of their religion. In the testimony of one year later, the Friends spoke to Philadelphia society in general and also to other religious groups. Admittedly, this may have been a cry for support to stop the violence against them, yet they again called for peace and cited Bible verses, hoping that all who followed Christ would see a higher calling and put an end to the war. They spoke of a "reconciliation of contending parties, on principles dictated by the spirit of Christ, who 'came not to destroy mens lives, but to save them,' Luke ix. 56."¹² While

they noted the deteriorating relationship with England, the Quakers nevertheless hoped that the tie between Great Britain and America would not be broken.

Despite this non-denominational plea, the Patriots ignored the Quakers' wish for peace and continued to target them for not supporting the Revolutionary cause. In "They Didn't Join the Band: Disaffected Women in Revolutionary Philadelphia," historian Judith Van Buskirk notes that rebel leaders believed that Quakers should have been forced to contribute monetarily to the war effort, in exchange for their lack of participation in militias. She also mentions that the Military Association's Committee of Privates felt that Friends "threatened the very existence of government 'under the pretense of liberty of conscience.'"¹³ Within this atmosphere, any actions by Quakers that appeared against America, whether in direct support of Great Britain or not, were considered acts of Loyalism by the rebels. Even so, a significant number of Friends remained true to their pacifist principles and refused to support the war, by not taking up arms and other means of conscientious objection.

One way Quakers expressed dissatisfaction was by refusing to use the new continental currency. According to historian Elaine J. Crauderueff, they had the following three reasons for opposing this money, as interpreted from the Minutes of a Yearly Meeting:

1. Paper money led to inflation and therefore depreciated in value.
2. . . . using the currency was a political statement endorsing an "authority whose legitimacy the Society did not acknowledge."
3. The money was raised to fund the war effort: it "was considered—not altogether unjustifiably—to be a covert means of taxation to finance the prosecution of war."¹⁴

While the first reason is an economic concern, the other two are consistent with Quaker religious principles that prohibit contributions of any kind to a war effort.

As can be imagined, the Quaker refusal to use continental money elicited a negative response from the radical Philadelphia government. The severity of its response to this and of other action taken against Quak-

ers is highlighted in the journals of two Quaker women whom Van Buskirk weaves into her article, those of Sarah Logan Fisher and Elizabeth Drinker. Both women were the wives of wealthy Quaker merchants, Thomas Fisher and Henry Drinker, respectively. These men chose to follow their faith over the revolutionary government and were disaffected to the rebel cause. Their reasons may have been economic since both men were well-to-do and their families were considered part of Philadelphia society's "best sort."¹⁵ However, the diaries of Sarah Fisher and Elizabeth Drinker provide valuable insight into the daily lives of Quaker women and the sufferings of their people.

Van Buskirk demonstrates that the currency matter affected the families of these women. Both Sarah Fisher's husband, Thomas, and Elizabeth Drinker's brother-in-law, John, were brought before the Committee of Inspection and Observation on February 5, 1776, for refusing to receive Bills of Credit issued by the authority of the Continental Congress. Thomas Fisher and John Drinker defended their actions as "scruples of conscience" against "money emitted for the purpose of war."¹⁶ The Committee ruled that this defense was inconsistent with their business practices, and made this decision: "This Committee, therefore do hold up to the world the said John Drinker, Thomas and Samuel Fisher, as Enemies to their Country, and Precluded from all Trade or Intercourse with the inhabitants of these Colonies."¹⁷ Van Buskirk claims, "These words were not idle threats," and offers the story of Thomas Fisher's store being vandalized by the Committee of Safety as an example.¹⁸ While the committee records condoning such behavior are sketchy, Van Buskirk cites the diary of one member of a Committee of Secrecy raiding party whose orders were to "examine all inimical and suspected persons."¹⁹ Such an examination, damaging property and stealing goods, is a departure from the Committee of Inspection's ruling which banned Fisher from trade and did not order that his property be vandalized. As such it raises the question whether raids like this were the product of resentment of the "best sort" carried out by the "lower sort" who were exercising their newfound power and social status by destroying and stealing Quaker property.

On January 1, 1777, the Council of Safety passed a resolution that considered anyone refusing to accept the continental currency "a dangerous Member of Society," while calling the disaffected "wicked and Mischievous" and "enemies to the United States of America."²⁰ Those who did not abide by this resolution had to forfeit goods, pay a fine of five pounds, and face being banned from trade.²¹ Another interesting aspect regarding this

issue is that the Council of Safety's resolution was a direct response to a resolution passed by the Continental Congress on December 26, 1776, which stated,

Resolved, That the Council of Safety of Pennsylvania be requested to take the most vigorous and Speedy measures for punishing all such as shall refuse Continental Currency, and that the General be directed to give all necessary Aid to the Council of Safety for carrying their measures on this subject into effectual execution.

By order of Congress.

Sign'd John Hancock, President.²²

While the Congressional resolution called for "vigorous and Speedy measures," it does not contain the harsh language used by the Council of Safety, pointing to the possibility that it was necessary for the new Philadelphia government leaders to portray disaffected Quakers as dangerous in order to seize and maintain control of the city amidst the changing power structure.

The "dangerous" and disaffected Quakers not participating in the war effort were further deprived of their personal freedoms and space when they were forced to quarter soldiers during the winter of 1777. This was a result of a resolution passed by the Council of Safety on January 22, 1777, by which Colonel Melcher, Barrack Master General, was "directed to Quarter the Militia upon the Non-Associators in this City."²³ Three days later, on January 25th, the council ordered the Drinker household to quarter five soldiers.²⁴

The greatest hardship faced by Elizabeth Drinker and Sarah Fisher was when their husbands and nineteen other men were imprisoned on suspicions of acting, in the words of Congress, "highly inimical to the cause of America."²⁵ They were arrested on September 4, 1777, and the Supreme Executive Council ordered that they be sent to Virginia.²⁶ The next day the Council resolved to discharge them if they took the required Oath or Affirmation of the Commonwealth, as recorded in the council minutes: "I do Swear (or affirm) that I will be faithful & bear true allegiance to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, as a free & independent State."²⁷ This resolution was insincere since the council undoubtedly knew that Quakers were prohibited from taking affirmations or oaths. Mekeel clarifies this point and asserts, "Friends could not subscribe to such affirmations or oaths because

the universal love of God led to peace with all men. Therefore, they could take no part, directly or indirectly, in the war, and the instant they took a test affirmation they took sides.”²⁸ The council was offering Drinker, Fisher, and the others their freedom, yet in such a way that if they accepted, would deny them the liberty of following their religion.

The men were officially banished to Virginia by a council resolution on September 9, 1777, and other than the vague “inimical to America” accusation, there were no formal charges against them.²⁹ In other words, no written document specified harms committed by any of them. Mekeel points out that the council had ordered the writ of habeas corpus put into effect, but the Pennsylvania legislature suspended this, indicating that there were other reasons for sending these men away, beyond any criminal threat they may have been to the city.³⁰

Apparently, the men were treated in a decent manner; however, the lives of Elizabeth Drinker and Sarah Fisher were made difficult because of the absence of their husbands. Van Buskirk notes that both wives believed their spouses were innocent and undeserving of the banishment, and she points out that they “questioned the ‘authority’ as well as the characterization of those who exercised it as ‘judicious.’”³¹ Van Buskirk also reveals that before their husbands were sent away, the women considered the oppressors “ragged and barefoot men,” and after, they believed them to be “threatening animals.”³² Historian Linda K. Kerber also cites Sarah Fisher’s diary where Fisher referred to the men as “the ravenous wolves and lions that prowl about for prey, seeking to devour those harmless innocents that don’t go hand in-hand with them in their cruelty and rapine.”³³ As the mother of five young children, Elizabeth Drinker provides a glimpse of the despair of such “harmless innocents” in her journal. Not long after the men were taken away, she notes concern for one of her children who was sick, after earlier referring to the month of September as a “Sickly season,” and she proclaims, “but where is his dear Father . . . at times my thoughts are hard to bare.”³⁴

Meanwhile, in response to the Philadelphia government’s actions against Quakers, the Friends formed committees at their Yearly Meeting in 1776 to investigate the sufferings of their people. They reported the findings of these committees at the Monthly Meetings of July and August 1777, and an overall description was published in the September 10th edition of *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. A report given by John Reynell noted, “we may observe that some Friends have been injured and their property,

by having blankets taken from them on account of their non-compliance with a requisition that was made for a number of blankets, for the purpose of equipping soldiers going to war."³⁵ John Shotwell's report also outlined offenses such as broken windows, the shutting up of houses and shops, other destructions of property, and the inconvenience of housing soldiers. He called those performing these acts "a rude rabble," and implied that they were only punishing Quakers in this manner. He said, "So far as have come to our knowledge, we have reason to believe Friends have mostly suffered in this."³⁶ Shotwell also itemized the Sufferings of the Quakers, claiming that, "The amount of Friends sufferings brought up from our several Monthly Meetings, chiefly for not bearing arms and paying taxes for supporting a war against the Government this year, is Four Hundred and Sixteen Pounds Five Shillings, Pennsylvania currency."³⁷ These reports merely outlined the injustices, and as they were being compiled for publication one committee member, Henry Drinker, was victim of another injustice when banished to Virginia. While the report does not offer a solution to end the sufferings of Quakers, Shotwell's itemization and reference to "a rude rabble" evoke the economic and class issues at play during this time.

Shortly after Philadelphia Friends released this report, Elizabeth Drinker was further inconvenienced by an order the council passed on October 21, 1777, giving the Clothier General and his agents permission to collect "blankets, shoes, and stockings, for the use of the Army" from all persons who had not taken the Oath of Allegiance, as required of all Philadelphia citizens. The council also made provisions for the seizure of property owned by citizens who did not take the oath.³⁸ On November 5, 1777, a soldier demanded blankets from Elizabeth Drinker, who refused. As a result, the soldier entered her home and took one anyway.³⁹

The British occupation of Philadelphia during the autumn of 1777 and spring of 1778 resulted in a general sense of fear among the radicals that their political power would be undermined by the English presence if a significant number of the city's inhabitants chose to align themselves with the King's army. Consequently, they passed a series of test acts beginning in 1777 to uphold allegiance to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The acts required all white males over the age of eighteen to forsake their loyalty to Great Britain, to recognize and maintain the freedom and independence of Pennsylvania, and to report any acts of treason they witnessed. The consequence of not swearing the oath was disfranchisement and the loss of other freedoms such as owning firearms or participating in real estate transactions.⁴⁰ With regards to the passage of the test acts and to the

way in which radicals constructed the Pennsylvania government in general, historian Peter C. Messer writes, "The radicals not only sought to begin the political world of Pennsylvania anew, but also to create a way for people to identify and distinguish between the genuine friends of the Revolution and those who did not fully embrace its principles."⁴¹ Although Messer does not specifically state that the radicals wanted to alienate Quakers and deprive only them of their civil liberties, his analysis points to a clear division between the "us" and "them" of Revolutionary politics that strengthened radical control.

The exiles remained in Virginia during most of the time that the British occupied Philadelphia. This form of control served the purpose of separating the Quaker leadership from the rest of the Friends as well as the Philadelphia citizenry. With such a prosperous and influential group of men absent, the Revolutionary government increased its power, hence the necessity to detain the exiles in Virginia. The Quakers who were exiled comprised both the political and economic elite of pre-Revolutionary Philadelphia, whereas the men who led the Revolutionary government were largely linked to the occupations on the lower end of the economic spectrum, such as artisans and tradesmen.⁴² On February 24, 1778, six Friends petitioned the Supreme Executive Council for the release of the men, to no avail.⁴³ Through a different means of agency, on April 6, 1778, Elizabeth Drinker and three other wives of exiled Quakers traveled to George Washington's headquarters at Valley Forge to ask for his intervention into the matter. She wrote in her journal that Washington treated the women to "an elegant dinner," but told them "he could do nothing in our busyness further than granting us a pass to Lancaster, which he did."⁴⁴ The Supreme Executive Council had taken refuge in Lancaster during the occupation, and Washington's pass would have allowed the women to present their case to the council. However, the council had already decided to bring the men to Lancaster, and shortly thereafter, granted them their freedom.⁴⁵ Mekeel points out that the Quakers were released, not because their imprisonment was unfair, but because "the Congress and the Pennsylvania authorities were becoming increasingly embarrassed" after two exiles died and the rest were in poor health because of their eight-month ordeal.⁴⁶ This comment illustrates the precarious position of the Revolutionary government and its need to present an image of fairness.

Later that spring the British occupation ended when the troops left Philadelphia on June 16, 1778. Immediately thereafter, the Pennsylvania government returned to the city and attempted to regain power over the

people of the city, particularly Quakers. One way they did this was to utilize the state's harsh laws against treason, a crime punishable by death. The cases of Abraham Carlisle and John Roberts, two Quakers charged with treason who were later executed on November 4, 1778, serve as an example of this. Both men were accused and found guilty of aiding the British army during the occupation, Roberts for acting as a guide and a spy, and Carlisle for holding a commission in the army.⁴⁷ However, the interesting point concerning their executions is not what they were guilty of, but the fact that they were put to death for treason in the first place. Messer notes that 130 people were accused of treason after the British left, but "only these two elderly Quakers suffered the maximum punishment permissible by law."⁴⁸ Historian Elaine Crane also points out that the judge in their cases, Thomas McKean, sentenced Roberts and Carlisle to death despite the jury's recommendation of mercy.⁴⁹ It is therefore plausible that Carlisle and Roberts were executed as examples of radical authority, not for their crimes. Not surprisingly, Elizabeth Drinker was very bothered by this act against two of her people, writing on October 17, "John Robarts Miller condem'd to die, Shocking doings!" and on November 4, "they have actually put to Death; Hang'd on the Commons, John Robarts and Am. Carlisle this moring or about noon—an awful Solemn day it has been."⁵⁰

The above legislation and action taken by Philadelphia radicals and the subsequent experiences of the Quakers highlight the turmoil of life in the city during the early years of the Revolution. It was a time of great change and uncertainty, during which the radical government attempted to unify citizens who supported the war against the disaffected. In addition, Philadelphia's Revolutionaries also acted outside of existing laws, or reinterpreted them in order to punish the disaffected on their own. In, "Controlling the Opposition in Pennsylvania During the American Revolution," historian Anne M. Ousterhout describes how citizens took the law into their own hands, punishing disaffected persons and judging them in their own "spontaneous courts."⁵¹ She also notes that Quakers were the "most severe sufferers" of this treatment.⁵²

Ousterhout's research sheds light on the understanding that the mistreatment of Quakers was far more extensive than that experienced by other groups, while also lending itself to the conclusion that the Friends were singled out because of deeper class resentment. Primary documents such as Elizabeth Drinker's journal paint a picture of the radicals as, what Buskirk calls, "ambition-ridden rogues" or "low-class thugs," yet they do not provide the whole story of the economic and political atmosphere of pre-

Revolutionary and Revolutionary Philadelphia.⁵³ Much historical work has been devoted to class issues and is very useful in analyzing the motivation behind the abovementioned laws and actions that affected the lives of Philadelphia Quakers.

In his study of colonial Quaker merchants, *Meeting House and Counting House*, Frederick B. Tolles notes, "by mid-century the largest proportion of Philadelphia's wealth as well as social prestige and political power was concentrated in the hands of the Quaker merchants."⁵⁴ Following this description, it is not surprising that a handful of Quaker merchants were among the group later banished to Virginia. Those merchants included Henry Drinker, Thomas Fisher, Abel James, James Pemberton, and Thomas Gilpin.⁵⁵

By exiling the merchant elite, the radical government temporarily removed what it perceived to be its greatest political threat, also hinting that a new class had become more prominent. Historian Gary B. Nash suggests that the middle- to lower-class artisans were essential to the radical government and comprised the group that rose in significance as the Quaker merchant grip on politics and society loosened when Friends bowed out of public office because of the war.⁵⁶ Nash also notes that while the religious beliefs of Philadelphia citizens did affect government decisions, "it could be said that class identity rather than religious affiliation . . . was the determining factor in how men made political choices."⁵⁷ Steven Rosswurm also discusses the manner in which artisans seized political opportunity in Revolutionary Philadelphia, determining that the shift in the political hierarchy defined the ways Philadelphia's citizens asserted themselves and that a similar shift is not visible in other cities of the Revolutionary time.⁵⁸ In addition, Rosswurm mentions that the lower sort became more powerful, evoking the words of Elizabeth Drinker and Sarah Logan Fisher. He writes,

It was not only ruling-class hostility to independence and the artisans' ascendance to power that made the Philadelphia Revolution so different. There also was the lower sort's rise to significance. Without the former, the latter would not have happened, but it is crucial that we account for the laboring poor's values and behavior independent of those developments. Once the balance of power had shifted and the militia formed, lower sort men asserted themselves with such speed, drama, and egalitarian force that there can be no doubt they had nourished within themselves, their families,

and their own spaces a realistic assessment of what was possible and impossible, along with an abiding disrespect and hostility toward hierarchy, wealth, and privilege.⁵⁹

Rosswurm's assessment that the lower class was motivated by a hatred of upper-class wealth and privilege is showcased by the behavior of radicals who seemingly, at every possible turn, used these feelings to limit the freedom and status of Quakers in the new political structure.

Wayne Bockelman and Owen Ireland's study of the ethnic and religious framework of Philadelphia adds to this class analysis in further highlighting a shift in Philadelphia's hierarchy. They note that Quakers were the largest bloc in the Pennsylvania Assembly in the seventeen years before the Revolution and that "an almost complete reversal of power" occurred by 1777; while Quakers and Anglicans controlled 63% of the seats in the Assembly before the break from England, 15 months after the Declaration of Independence, over 90% of the seats were controlled by Presbyterians, Reformed, and Lutherans.⁶⁰ The importance of Bockelman and Ireland's assessment is that it shows the marginalization of Quakers in the political structure and the transformation of other, formerly non-prominent groups into positions of power.

Peter Messer's analysis of the treason trials of Abraham Carlisle and John Roberts also points to the political turmoil of Revolutionary Philadelphia. He argues that the execution of the two Quakers served the purpose of consolidating radical power. In addition, he implies that the men were hanged in order to display radical authority and show the citizens of Philadelphia the consequences of betraying the Patriot cause. Messer notes that many Patriots expressed support for sparing the lives of the two men, which caused the most radical Patriots to fear that their cause was being dismantled. The radicals reasoned that a show of force against the disaffected was the best way to keep the Patriot cause from unraveling.⁶¹

In this atmosphere many radicals felt that Quakers, by not participating in the war effort or swearing allegiance to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, were undermining their efforts to consolidate power and control the Philadelphia government. While the Friends defended their behavior on the basis of their religious faith, many Philadelphians refused to believe this and accused them of using their faith to hide their fears of disfranchisement and loss of political power. They were also criticized for protesting the restriction of their freedoms by the Revolutionary government. One man,

using the pseudonym, “Belisarius,” spoke to the Quakers in the August 15, 1778, edition of *The Pennsylvania Packet*, and said,

You “desire to be permitted to enjoy the rights and immunities which” your “forefathers purchased through much suffering and difficulty.” What are those rights? Did you purchase a right to the privileges of free citizens, and obtain a grant for the enjoyment of them without being bound to afford to your fellow citizens the same protection which they are bound to give you? A right to protection of government, without sharing in both the expence and danger of defending that government?⁶²

Belisarius also stated that since the Quakers refused to take the oath of allegiance, they were technically not citizens of Pennsylvania at all. Additionally, his words evoke an image of Quakers trying to argue that they should be left alone because of their social standing in his statement, “You affect too, to speak of your ancestors, the quakers, as the only people who settled and improved this country, and seem to found some claims on this circumstance: My ancestor settled here as early as any of yours, and yet he was not a Quaker.”⁶³ While hinting at the resentment of Quakers, this article also shows the complicated position of the Friends in Philadelphia, as their decision to conscientiously object to the war negated their claim to Pennsylvania citizenship in the eyes of the radicals. This, in turn, gave the radicals grounds to strip Quakers of their liberties at the same time they increased their own.

Conclusion

The 1776 Constitution of Pennsylvania states, “it is our indispensable duty to establish such original principles of government, as will best *promote the general happiness* of the people of this State, and their posterity, and provide for future improvements, *without partiality for, or prejudice against any particular class, sect, or denomination of men whatever.*”⁶⁴ On the surface, the words written by the Revolutionary government offer the appearance of a state constitution that considers all people equal and provides its citizens with protection accordingly. Yet, the experiences of the Philadelphia Quakers suggest otherwise. Under the conditions of political uncertainty and war, the Friends chose to proclaim publicly their allegiance to God, not any man or government. As a result, they were targeted as traitors by the radical government. With the label “enemy to the state,” they were deprived of the very liberties for which the Patriots were fighting.

This study sheds light on the political and social undercurrents of Philadelphia society that led to this treatment. Understandably, not all Quakers were neutral to the Revolution; however, the diary of Elizabeth Drinker and the testimonies issued by the Friends highlight their desire to live peacefully. The majority of Drinker's journal entries during the Revolutionary period offer little commentary on the political upheaval of the time. Instead, she wrote about her daily life and the travails of caring for the health of her young children. Drinker only expressed anger at the government when her husband was taken away from her.

What is valuable to this study is Drinker's perception of Philadelphia's radicals as lower-class thugs, because it supports the idea of the "lower sort" quickly seizing control after the Quakers moved away from the political realm. I have found little direct evidence that a desire to improve their class status, rather than to preserve the liberty and freedom of Pennsylvania against British tyranny, motivated the radicals. However, after the Quakers had occupied the political majority for over seventeen years before the Revolution, it is conceivable that other groups and classes harbored resentment against them and saw the Revolution as a time for personal gain. The Quakers were vocal in their objection to the war, and thus they were easy targets to abuse.

Furthermore, the experiences of the Philadelphia Quakers offer a non-traditional history lesson on the American Revolution that does not paint a picture of a unified America battling British injustices. Instead, it brings to light the many complicated issues involved in constructing a nation or a state, or even a city within that nation and state. Revolutionary Philadelphia was a city at a crossroads between colonial rule and democracy, and in order to achieve that democracy, government leaders felt it was necessary to deny liberties to anyone who did not believe in their principles.

NOTES

1. Judith Van Buskirk, "They Didn't Join the Band: Disaffected Women in Revolutionary Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania History* 62 (Summer 1995): 312.

2. Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, "Revolutionary War Forfeited Estates," *Doc Heritage*, www.docheritage.state.pa.us/documents/forfeitedestates.asp (accessed March 3, 2003).

3. Arthur J. Mekeel, *The Quakers and the American Revolution* (York, England: Sessions Book Trust, 1996), 97.

4. Elaine J. Crauderueff, *War Taxes: Experiences of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Quakers through the American Revolution* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill, 1989), 18.
5. James Pemberton, "The Testimony of the People Called Quakers, given forth by a Meeting of the Representatives of said People, in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, held at Philadelphia the 24th day of the 1st Month, 1775," *Pennsylvania Gazette*, September 10, 1777, Accessible Archives CD-Rom edition of the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1991, folio 3 (1766-1783).
6. John Pemberton, "An Epistle from the Meeting for sufferings, held in Philadelphia for Pennsylvania and New Jersey, the 5th day of the 1st Month 1775," *Pennsylvania Gazette*, September 10, 1777, Accessible Archives CD-Rom edition of the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1991, folio 3 (1766-1783).
7. Ibid.
8. Van Buskirk, "They Didn't Join the Band," 306-307.
9. Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, "Revolutionary War Forfeited Estates."
10. Van Buskirk, "They Didn't Join the Band," 309-310.
11. John Pemberton, "The Ancient Testimony and principles of the people called Quakers, renewed, with respect to the King and Government," *Pennsylvania Gazette*, September 10, 1777, Accessible Archives CD-Rom edition of the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1991, folio 3 (1766-1783).
12. Ibid.
13. Van Buskirk, "They Didn't Join the Band," 310.
14. Crauderueff, *War Taxes*, 19.
15. Catherine Goetz, "A Woman of the 'Best Sort': The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker," in *Life in Early Philadelphia: Documents from the Revolutionary and Early National Periods*, ed. Billy G. Smith, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 133.
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25. William Ch. Houston, "In Congress, August 28, 1777," *Pennsylvania Packet*, September 9, 1777, Accessible Archives CD-Rom edition of the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1991, folio 3 (1766-1783).
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27. "Minutes of the Supreme Executive Council, Friday, September 5, 1777," *Minutes*, 291-92.
28. Mekeel, *The Quakers and the American Revolution*, 210.
29. "Minutes of the Supreme Executive Council, Tuesday, September 9, 1777," *Minutes*, 295-97.

30. Mekeel, *The Quakers and the American Revolution*, 203.
31. Van Buskirk, "They Didn't Join the Band," 314.
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33. Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect & Ideology in Revolutionary America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), 76.
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40. Peter C. Messer, "'A Species of Treason & Not the Least Dangerous Kind': The Treason Trial of Abraham Carlisle and John Roberts," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 113, no. 4 (October 1999): 310.
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42. Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 374-82.
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46. *Ibid.*
47. Messer, "A Species of Treason," 303.
48. *Ibid.*, 303-304.
49. Drinker, *Diary*, 81 n.14.
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61. Messer, "A Species of Treason," 316-22.

62. Belisarius, "To the Meeting for Sufferings for Pennsylvania and New Jersey," *Pennsylvania Packet*, August 15, 1778, Accessible Archives CD-Rom edition of the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1991, folio 3 (1766-1783).

63. Ibid.

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