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THE QuAKERS OF PERQUIMANS.

BY JULIA S. WHITE.

To write of the Quakers of Perquimans County involves almost the complete history of the Friends' Church in North Carolina for the first seventy-five years of its existence. It also involves the beginning of all North Carolina church history; for, so far as known, the first religious gathering in the State was a Quaker meeting. Says the Rt. Rev. Joseph Blount Cheshire in the North Carolina Booklet of April, 1906, page 261: "Quakerism was the only organized form of religion in the colony, with no rival worship among the people for the rest of the seventeenth century (1672). * * * It drew to itself a number of the intelligent and well-disposed inhabitants, especially of Perquimans and Pasquotank. * * * These zealous and self-sacrificing men deserve to be held in honorable memory, who at the expense of so much time, labor, and bodily suffering, cultivated the spiritual harvest in that distant and unattractive field. Quakerism did not begin the work of settlement, and of reclaiming the wilderness for civilization, but it has the greater honor of having brought some organized form of Christianity to the infant colony, and of having cared for those wandering sheep whom others neglected."

The first Quaker in North Carolina was one Henry Phillips, who had been a member of that church in New England previous to his coming to Carolina in 1665; though William Edmundson, an Irish Quaker preacher, was the real instigator of Quakerism among the settlers. This "traveling Friend" after much hardship reached a place probably not far distant from where the town of Hertford now stands, and in a three days stay held two religious services. One of these two was at the home of Henry Phillips, who, with his family,

had wept for joy at the coming of Edmundson, not having seen a Quaker for seven years. The second of these services was at the home and by the invitation of one Francis Toms, a justice of the peace, who with his wife had at the first meeting "received the truth with gladness." Edmundson was followed in a few months by George Fox himself, the founder of the church. Fox's carefully kept diary gives much insight into the methods and route of travel as well as the conditions, social and religious, in the infant settlement. No doubt his coming had much to do in fostering and establishing the church, especially by instigating his letters of advice written after his return to England.

Four years later Edmundson returns to Carolina and says, "Friends were finely settled and I left things well among them." All of this occurred in what is now Perquimans County; and from that day to this (1672-1908), a term of two hundred and thirty-six years, Friends have been prominent citizens of that county.

Friends (this term is far preferable to Quaker, though the latter has no longer the opprobrium of its origin) until very recent years included in their church organization four distinct assemblies, viz: the Preparative, the Monthly, the Quarterly, and the Yearly Meeting. The first has now been done away with and all yearly meetings which have adopted what is known as the Uniform Discipline are no longer a court of final appeal or distinct within themselves as in early days, but are subject to the action of the Five-Years Meeting, or rather the consensus of opinion of all the Friends on the American continent.

Of the transactions of their various meetings for business the Friends have been unusually careful to preserve a record, and these manuscripts are now invaluable to the student, giving not only an insight into the social condition of the time, but also the methods of church discipline and authority and

the doings of its members. The faithful records of the marriage certificates with the signatures of the witnesses, the chronicling of births and deaths, all give the genealogist a mine yielding rich returns.

The oldest record preserved by the Quakers of North Carolina is a marriage certificate of Christopher Nicholson and Ann Attwood, both of Perquimans, and dating 1682, which it will be noted, is just ten years after the visits of Edmundson and Fox. The regular minutes of the business meetings do not begin till later, and these are rather fragmentary as they were not properly collected till 1728.

The first organization of Friends in Perquimans County was known as Perquimans Monthly Meeting. After 1764 it was called Wells'. This meeting finally set off Sutton's Creek Monthly Meeting and transferred itself to Piney Woods Monthly Meeting in 1794. Piney Woods Monthly Meeting is the only monthly meeting in that county at the present time, and is, as shown, the direct outgrowth of the first organization of Quakers in the State. The Wells' meeting house stood not far from the present town of Winfall, just across the road from the Jessup homestead. A rather interesting episode occurs in the annals of this meeting. It seems that one Jonathan Pearson had for some reason filled up the spring to which Friends of this meeting had had access. He was "churched" in regard to the same and so the spring was opened again.

Almost coequal with the growth and development of Quakerism in Perquimans County was that in Pasquotank County, and the two monthly meetings joined in constituting a superior, or quarterly meeting known as Eastern Quarter. This was done in 1681, and in 1698 the yearly meeting was established, embracing only the one quarter and the two monthly meetings. For nearly three-quarters of a century (till 1757) this was the condition of the church.

Perquimans County continued to be the radiating center for Quakerism for the first century of the State's history; that is, until the great migratory wave of Quakers from Nantucket, New England, Pennsylvania, and other points north had swept into our borders and organized themselves and asserted their powers. Then the Quakers of Perquimans shared their power and a new quarterly meeting was established in the section near where Guilford College now stands, which by way of distinction was called *Western Quarter*. The migratory spirit was in the air and the old Teutonic blood which had made our sturdy forefathers first cross the Virginia border now impelled many of them to move from the lowlands to the Piedmont section of the State. But for eighty-eight years (till 1786) the yearly meeting of North Carolina (that is the highest authority in the church) was held either at Perquimans or Old Neck or Little River—all in Perquimans County. Then there was a series of years (1787-1812) in which the yearly meeting alternated between Perquimans and Guilford Counties, with four exceptions when Pasquotank claimed the honor. So that it is only in recent years, 1812-date, that Perquimans County has not been a rallying point for the Quakerism of the whole State.

As to what part of the population the Quakers were, there is no means of determining; but this fact is assured, that prior to 1700 the Quakers had things much their own way in church and state and that this "golden age" of North Carolina Quakerism culminated in the appointment of a Quaker governor, John Archdale, who, though giving his time and energy to South Carolina, left an impress and gained much prestige and recognition for his co-religionists in North Carolina.

Early in the eighteenth century the Quakers began to need all the metal which was in them in order to breast the tide of opposition and to remain true to what they believed right. Governor Walker aroused the Church of England in such

words as these addressed to the Bishop of London: "My Lord, we have been settled near this fifty years in this place, and I may justly say most part of twenty-one years, on my own knowledge, without priest or altar, and before that time, according to all that appears to me, much worse, George Fox some years ago came into these parts and by strange infatuations, did infuse the Quakers' principles into some small number of the people; which did and hath continued to grow ever since very numerous, by reason of their yearly sending in men to encourage and exhort them to their wicked principles; and here was none to dispute nor to oppose them in carrying on their pernicious principles for many years, until God, of his infinite goodness was pleased to inspire the Rev. Dr. Bray * * * to send in some books * * * of the explanation of the church catechism, etc." * * *

"My Lord, I humbly beg leave to inform you, that we have an assembly to sit the 3rd of November next, and there is above *half* of the burgesses that are chosen are Quakers, and have declared their designs of making void the act for establishing the church; if your lordship, out of his good and pious care for us, doth not put a stop to this growth, we shall the most part, especially the children born here, become heathens."

This quotation, lengthy as it is, is yet of great intrinsic value. It shows a great antagonism on the part of the writer for the Quakers, and incidentally their origin, growth and present power. That one-half the burgesses were of the Quaker faith is about the nearest approximation we can secure as to relative numbers in their community, and this was in their years of waning power too.

But more than all, it shows us the beginnings of a long struggle between church and state, and the beginning of a protest on the part of the Quakers which has eventually resulted in the existence of many of the civil and religious privi-

leges of today; notable among them is the privilege of affirmation by any individual and in any court of justice, rather than the taking of the legal oath.

That a vigorous effort was made and much legislation secured toward making the Church of England the church of the Carolinas is easily shown by a study of the legal enactments of the time. That the Quakers were for a long time the only organized body of Dissenters must necessitate crediting them with trying to stem in its beginning the current which was about to sweep from us religious tolerance and individual liberty. To be sure in later years (from 1750-) the Presbyterians were much more potent in this struggle, but the Quakers held the fort until that time. As to taking the oath (and the laws of our State have on the face of them seemed lenient toward Quakers), it will hardly be claiming too much to say that the universal privilege of affirmation in any court of justice in our State is an outgrowth of Quaker influence. It must not be overlooked, however, that it was just this matter of taking an oath which first put the Quakers out of politics and which eventually made it a disownable offense for any members of the Friends' Church to hold office under the government. It is only in recent years, very recent years, that Friends have awakened to the fact that they may without being untrue to the tenets of their faith hold office. We are glad to realize that they are again making themselves a part of civic life and doing their part politically, as well as socially, in the great civic awakening which is spreading over our country.

Another point in which the Quakers figure largely in the early law annals of our State and in which the Quakers of Perquimans must have been prime movers, as it occurred in the years when they were the leaders of Quakerism in the State, is in regard to taking up arms. They paid gladly their militia fines which were *thrice* the usual tax on property; and while

these taxes were heavy at times, and long imposed, i. e., till 1783, the Quakers then were even more so than now, it seems, extremely careful to meet all financial obligations, so that there was credence in the old adage, "A Quaker's word is as good as his bond." While today the man who would vouch for the genuineness of an article of production must call it "Quaker Oats," "Quaker Gelatine," etc.

That the Quakers were a large majority of the inhabitants of Perquimans in 1723 can be almost assured from the following data. At that time the law of 1715 was in force which provided "that no Quaker or reputed Quaker shall by virtue of this act (that is of affirming instead of taking the oath) be qualified or permitted to give evidence in any criminal causes or to serve on any jury, or bear any office or place of profit or trust in the government." Now we have a list of jurymen in the various precincts for the year 1723, and while Pasquotank and Chowan have 156 and 142, respectively, Perquimans has only 54, and Perquimans was just as old a province as either of the other two. Furthermore, in this list the surnames so familiar in Quaker records are conspicuously absent. Despite all this, in the formative days of the civil and ecclesiastical history of the Old North State, the Quaker was a very influential individual; and shall we not claim that this wide influence of what Weeks calls the "flower of Puritanism," was the great influence which preserved our State from any dark pages of history, pages which mar the annals of Virginia and Massachusetts, and place us along with Pennsylvania in matters of justice to the Indian and opposition to war?

So much for the Quakers of Perquimans and their relation to the State. It now remains to be told of their workings among themselves. Their records show many points of interest and much which seems to us like an infringement of personal liberty and that the church was overstepping its bounds.

With the special privilege granted the Quaker in regard to the marriage rite, it is matter of much pride to the church that it exercised so much care in this regard. Upon every occasion careful inquiry is made in regard to the life and conversation of the parties wishing to marry, and especially in regard to their freedom from marriage relations; and then the church has its representatives present at the wedding and they must be responsible and report on the good order maintained at the ceremony and produce to the meeting the marriage certificate always very carefully and explicitly written, with the names of many witnesses to the ceremony affixed thereto. The whole thing with the signatures is properly recorded in the church books provided for that purpose.

It might be said on passing that these records which the Friends have always been so careful to keep are one of the fruitful sources for genealogical study before mentioned.

"Marrying out," that is, marrying some one not in membership with the Friends, was a disownable offense; and it was thus that the Quakers lost many members. The church would not grant its permission to a marriage request sometimes, and such a thing as a man's not having paid his debts would hinder no less than grosser evils if such were detected.

Indeed, it has always been a care of the Quakers to keep their outward affairs in proper condition, and in the early days of the Perquimans records, where boundary lines were not marked with sufficient definiteness, one of the principal matters of church record is the settlement *by the church* of such differences as may arise in regard to land tenure. The manner in which these differences were settled is something like this: the two contesting parties would each name an equal number of individuals to act as arbitrators, and the church would appoint *one*; and generally such a committee reached a satisfactory conclusion. Should either party appeal to the courts for justice, he was immediately "churched,"

and if no acknowledgement was made, he was disowned. "Brother goeth to war with brother and that before the unbeliever," had a very vivid meaning to the Quaker fathers.

The Perquimans records show time and again that its members were under surveillance if they were not prompt and exact in the payment of their debts. In 1769 a party is disowned for bankruptcy. This is the actual wording of the inquiry which was made at least once a year, and generally oftener, for nearly two hundred years in the Quaker church: "Do you maintain strict integrity in all transactions in trade and in your outward concerns; and are you careful not to defraud the public revenue?" or something in substance the same.

Other matters which concerned the Quakers of Perquimans in the pioneer days seem trivial only as they give an insight into the social customs of the time and also what the Quakers regarded as right. For example, one Friend asked the church for the privilege of wearing a wig, and the request was *not granted*; but some years later another request came up and the privilege *was granted*, with the advice "to wear a *plain one*."

So soon as a member was known to be "drinking to excess" or "using bad language," he was at once "churched;" and twice the records of Perquimans show where individuals were up before the church for "striking or whipping their wives," and once a Friend is reputed to be keeping a tavern. The committee of investigation is appointed and the tavern keeper, by forsaking his chosen business, is restored into good fellowship.

But these are of the early days. At the present time there are two hundred and ninety-six Friends in Perquimans and Chowan Counties (the latter has only about thirty-five). These all belong to Piney Woods Monthly Meeting, which is composed of Piney Woods and Up River meetings for worship.

Quakerism in Perquimans has long been on the wane. The peremptory way in which Friends have disowned its members make us almost wonder that any at all are left. But it was not disownment any more than migration which brought about the present condition. The Teutonic spirit which made the people first migrate into the State was the same which, working in their descendants, caused them to move further South or over West, seeking new lands and new environment. For there was a decided exodus from Perquimans to points South and also to points in central Carolina. As the Quakers were very careful to take their church credentials with them, it is easy to follow them from place to place as they moved.

The Quaker protest against slavery and war, when he found he could not remove the one from our midst much as he succeeded in getting it out of his church, and when he would not take part in the other—the Quaker's protest, I say, was a very quiet one, that of leaving the State; and the Quakers of Perquimans were among those who so largely settled the free States of Ohio and Indiana. It was this migration which left the Quakers on their original site not a weak body, but shorn of much of its strength.

What the Quakers have been to the county and the community is best shown by stating a few facts. For seventy-two years the Quakers of Perquimans have maintained an academy at Belvidere which has always stood for high grade work and has been, and still is, recognized as one of the most worthy institutions for secondary education in the State. This institution now enrolls about one hundred and thirty pupils per year who are here prepared for any of the leading colleges of our State.

The Total Abstinence Society of Perquimans and Chowan Counties, which claims to be the second oldest temperance organization in the State, dating back to the early part of the

nineteenth century, while by no means an exclusively Quaker organization, had as its founders men of Quaker faith and such have always been its ardent supporters, working shoulder to shoulder with the Baptists. This fact is worthy of mention at this time; for in the recent election in Edenton the temperance forces at work there felt and acknowledged the fruits of the work of this pioneer organization.

Shakespeare says, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other name would smell as sweet;" and on the naming of their places of worship, the Friends had no ear for the artistic or euphonious, but were purely *local*. This strict adherence to facts is full of hints to the research student, and the hallowed associations are just as sweet as if we had not such names to bring them up as those named below. All of the Friends' meetings, that is, all of the places in which church services have been held in Perquimans County, aside from the private houses first used, are as follows: Perquimans, Wells', Suttons' Creek, Old Neck, Little River, Boice's, Beech Spring, Piney Woods and Up River.

As to the people, the surnames which appear in the Quaker records of these meetings are names still to be found in Perquimans and adjoining counties or are among those transplanted to central Carolina and the middle West. Notable among them are Nicholson, Albertson, White, Winslow, Newby, Toms, Bagley, Elliott, Blanchard, Nixon, Cannon and others equally as important, but the list is already too long. I mention the last for it is not a matter of conjecture, but a matter of history that the present Speaker of the House, Joseph G. Cannon, is not only of Quaker extraction through his mother, but also on his father's side; and that were the Cannons of Guilford County traced back a few generations, Perquimans might come in for a share of the honor, if such there be, attaching to our countryman.

While Quakerism in Perquimans has much to be proud of in its past history and can pride itself in the worthy citizens which it has produced, we believe none in the past can surpass some of the standard-bearers of the present day, and though the outlook in that county might be more hopeful, the outlook for Quakerism in the State was never more encouraging; and we know that much of the brain and sinew of the Perquimans Quakers are only transferred and are now working in other and more aggressive portions of our State, looking steadily to the future, but never unmindful of the past.

