

Heather E. Barry, "Naked Quakers Who Were Not So Naked" *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* Volume 43, No. 2 (Summer 2015).

Published by: Institute for Massachusetts Studies and Westfield State University

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**Day of Doom**

In this striking painting by Howard Pyle Jr., Quaker Mary Dyer is depicted on her walk to the gallows. Dyer defied banishment and a standing death sentence to witness her faith. She was hanged in Boston on June 1, 1660, the only Quaker woman to be hanged in New England.

# Naked Quakers Who Were Not So Naked: Seventeenth-Century Quaker Women in the Massachusetts Bay Colony

HEATHER E. BARRY



**Abstract:** *This article examines forty-five Quaker women who preached and protested against orthodox Puritans in the Massachusetts Bay Colony from 1656 to the 1670s. These women protested by their unauthorized arrival to the colony, holding Quaker meetings, disseminating Quaker literature, disturbing Puritan church services, “walking naked” in public, and not attending required Church services. Some historians consider these early women to be irrational, single, social deviants who were on the margins of society. On the contrary, evidence indicates that seventeenth-century Quaker women who lived or visited the Massachusetts Bay Colony were usually literate, married mothers of middling socioeconomic status in their twenties or thirties who believed it was necessary to protest against Puritan authorities. These early Quakers made it easier for women to gain power without rejecting seventeenth-century gender roles regarding*

*marriage and motherhood. Inadvertently, they began to challenge the role of women in society, which laid the groundwork for future reform movements.*

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It is often difficult for Americans to grapple with the religious past of early Puritan settlers. Many Americans continue to be taught that Puritans settled in the Massachusetts Bay Colony to promote "religious liberty," and that led to American freedom of religion. The past is significantly more complicated than this simple cause and effect statement. Puritans settled in colonial America for religious liberty; however, they defined liberty to mean that they allowed everyone to practice their "true" form of Christianity. During the seventeenth century, if one practiced anything else, he or she was asked to change his or her views or leave the colony. Many who decided to worship in unorthodox ways were fined, imprisoned, whipped, mutilated, banished, and even executed. One significant group that experienced these punishments was the Quakers, or the Society of Friends as they came to be known. Quakers rejected the Puritan beliefs of predestination, trained ministers for religious leaders, and the idea of established churches. An essential tenet of Quakers was their belief that God revealed himself to people through "the light within." This led many Quakers to use "signs and wonders" to express their religious beliefs.

Quakers arose in England during the English Civil Wars (1642–1651) to protest against English societal norms and, specifically, orthodox Puritan beliefs. Quakers began as an unorganized movement until George Fox (1624–1691) brought structure to the group. Until the 1650s, the group did not even have a clear name to call themselves—some referred to each other as "Friends" or "children of light." Eventually the group adopted the term Quaker. This ambiguity lends itself to much interpretation about early Quakers and their beliefs. Nevertheless, estimates indicate that by 1660 they had a significant following in England—between thirty to sixty thousand out of a total population of 5 million.<sup>1</sup> Quakers challenged Puritans in England and, beginning in the 1650s, in the British North American colonies.

There is some controversy about the social and economic origins of early Quakers in both England and in Massachusetts. Histories written about

Quakers residing in England have a slightly different view of the social origins of the group than histories written about Massachusetts Quakers. English historians Barry Reay in *The Quakers and the English Revolution* (1985), Alan Cole in “The Social Origins of the Early Friends” (1957), and Adrian Davies in *The Quakers in English Society, 1655–1725* (2000) all agree that early Quakers were of the “middling” sort; few were from the gentry or landless.<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, Carla Gardina Pestana in *The City Upon a Hill Under Siege* (1983) argues that early Quakers who traveled to Massachusetts were from a lower social and economic status than Quakers in England.<sup>3</sup> This disagreement has more to do with defining what “middling” status means than fundamental differences in evidence. Most evidence clearly shows that early Quakers were farmers, small landowners, merchants, and artisans, which means they were common seventeenth-century individuals instead of people on the margins of society.

Several questions need to be answered in order to assess the significance of seventeenth-century female Quakers in Massachusetts. Were these women extreme itinerants who represented only the radical fringe of society or were they average women at the time? Were they young, middle-aged, old? Were they married, and if so, did they have children and how many? Were they literate, and what social/economic status did they hold? What were their charged crimes and how were they punished? Answering these questions provides useful information about a typical seventeenth-century Quaker in Massachusetts. This study also describes what actions some early Quakers took to witness to Puritans and how government officials responded to their actions.

## QUAKER WOMEN IN REVOLT

My research involves over forty-five Quaker women who were arrested for preaching and protesting against orthodox Puritans in the Massachusetts Bay Colony from 1656 to the 1670s. This period reflected the height of “early” Quaker activity and Puritan response in Massachusetts. The total number of Quakers is unknown, but by 1660 at least several hundred Quakers resided in Massachusetts. These women protested by their unauthorized arrival to the colony, holding Quaker meetings, disseminating Quaker literature, disturbing Puritan church services, “walking naked” in public, and for not attending required Church services.

The collected data on these women included their age, marital status, number of children, where they were from, their family’s social/economic status, their charged crime, and how they were punished.<sup>4</sup> Twenty-six women

came from outside of Massachusetts and eighteen women were residents who converted to Quakerism. Overall, twenty-nine were married and twenty-three of them had husbands who were confirmed Quakers. One woman was widowed, and two women married soon after their arrival in the colony. Overall, ten women were single; however, two of the females were under the age of fifteen. The marital statuses of five of the women are still unknown.

The evidence reveals that more than half of the Quaker women who came to Massachusetts from the outside (abroad?) were married. In addition, most came from middling social/economic status families and were literate enough to read. Evidence shows that these early Quakers were not just an uneducated and poor fringe group who wanted to break away from socially constructed gender roles. They were literate, married women who believed they were called by God to speak “the truth.” Quakers challenged the common Christian belief that women should not preach, especially in churches and to men. However, they were not social deviants who completely rejected seventeenth-century gender-constructed roles since they still upheld societal norms regarding marriage and motherhood. In addition, evidence indicates that punishments placed upon these early Quakers varied with each person, situation, and county within the colony. According to Jonathan Chu’s *Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen: The Puritan Adjustment to Quakerism in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts Bay* (1985), the authorities were actually quite lenient on these early Quaker women. The laws seemed harsh, but oftentimes the courts did not carry out the stated punishments for Quaker “crimes” or they were lessened to a great degree.<sup>5</sup>

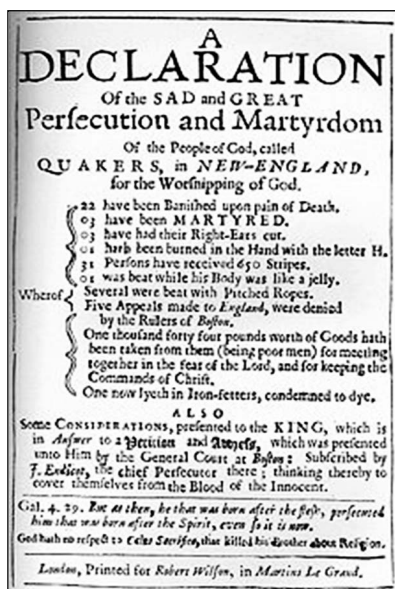
It is important to make a distinction between visiting and resident Quakers of Massachusetts. Colonial lawmakers, primarily the Court of Assistants, made this distinction, as did the Quakers themselves when it came to anti-Quaker laws and punishments. Visiting female Quakers were usually in their twenties and more than half were married. They were punished more severely than resident Quakers; however, punishments were not systematic or consistent. The first two Quakers to arrive in Massachusetts, Anne Austin and Mary Fisher, landed in 1656.<sup>6</sup> Austin was described as being “advanced in age” and married with five children, and Fisher was single and in her early twenties.<sup>7</sup> They brought Quaker literature with them to Boston, which implies they were literate.

Deputy-Governor Richard Bellingham heard that these women were arriving and he immediately had them arrested, questioned, strip searched, and then sentenced to close prison.<sup>8</sup> (“Close prison” meant they were not allowed to speak or communicate with anyone outside of the prison.) Their books and pamphlets were burned and they were imprisoned for five weeks

until Simon Kempthorn, the ship captain who brought them, took them away at his own expense. The Massachusetts General Court justified these actions against them because Quakerism was seen as a threat to the Massachusetts Bay Colony. The Court considered Quakers “a cursed sect of heretics” who held “blasphemous opinions, despising government and the order of God in church and Commonwealth.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, from the perspective of the Court, these actions against Quakers were needed to preserve the peace and harmony of the colony. The General Court made their position clear: they wanted Quakers to stay away from the colony. If Quakers violated that request, then further actions would be taken. It took only a couple of days for further action to be required.

Two days after Austin and Fisher were on their way back to Barbados, four more female Quakers arrived along with four male Quakers. The four women, Mary Prince, Sarah Gibbons, Mary Weatherhead (Witherhead), and Dorothy Waugh, traveled from England and they were all in their twenties, single, and childless.<sup>10</sup> They disseminated Quaker literature, preached in the streets, and broke bottles in the middle of John Norton’s church services to protest against the teachings of orthodox Puritans. They were arrested, put into close prison and banished from the colony.<sup>11</sup>

In response to the arrival of these Quakers, the General Court passed a series of laws. On October 14, 1656, Court officials passed a law that fined ship captains a hundred pounds if they brought a known Quaker to the colony and they had to transport the person out of the colony at his or her own expense. In addition, any Quaker who arrived was to be imprisoned, whipped, and forced to work until they could be transported out of the colony. The law read:



**Book of Martyrdom**

Published in 1661, *A Declaration of the Sad and Great Persecution and Martyrdom of the People God Called Quakers* described the ordeal of Quakers in New England.

It is hereby further ordered and enacted, that what Quaker so ever shall arrive in this country from foreign parts, or come into this jurisdiction from any parts adjacent, shall be forthwith committed to the house of correction, and at their entrance to be severely whipped, and by the master thereof be kept to work, and none suffered to converse or speak with them during the times of their imprisonment....<sup>12</sup>

In addition, any person bringing or keeping Quaker literature was to be fined. Residents were also targeted with this legislation because those who supported Quakers or their ideas were first fined, then jailed, and eventually banished if they did not change their views.<sup>13</sup>

This law indicated that Quakers and their beliefs threatened the colonial authorities. The Court asserted that the Quakers were not only heretics but also against civil order. The authorities noted that Quakers despised government and “the order of God in church and commonwealth.” Therefore, the Quakers were undermining the colony on two levels—civilly and religiously.<sup>14</sup> From the perspective of the Puritan leaders, this made Quakers even more dangerous than others because of their views on government and church. After this initial group of single women came, more married women traveled to the colony to spread their Quaker views, and the next woman to arrive was the infamous Mary Dyer.

## **THE CASE OF “MARTYR” MARY DYER**

Mary Dyer lived in Boston from about 1635 to 1637 with her husband, William Dyer, and their children. She was a close friend of Anne Hutchinson and an opponent of the orthodox leaders of Massachusetts. The Dyers, along with many others, were banished from the colony in 1637 because of their unorthodox beliefs. The Dyers then moved to Rhode Island and became respectable citizens, and William held political office for several years.<sup>15</sup> The Dyers visited England in 1652 and William returned to Rhode Island while Mary lingered in England. Mary then converted to Quakerism and became an avid follower.

She returned to the Bay Colony in 1657 en route to Rhode Island with her widowed Quaker friend, Ann Burden.<sup>16</sup> Burden traveled to Boston to collect outstanding debts owed to her late husband’s estate. The Massachusetts authorities heard of their arrival and had both Dyer and Burden arrested and imprisoned for several weeks. Dyer’s husband, William, traveled to Boston and convinced the authorities to release Mary.



In addition, Burden was sent away without collecting the money she was owed.

In the same year as Dyer and Burden's visit, the General Court passed another anti-Quaker law. The October 14, 1657 law indicated that if a Quaker did not leave the jurisdiction after punishment under the original law, harsher punishments resulted. The law read:

Every such male Quaker shall for the offense have one of his ears cut off, and be kept at work in the house of correction until he can be sent away at his own charge, and for the second offence shall have his other ear cut off...and every woman Quaker that hath suffered the law here that shall presume to come into this jurisdiction shall be severely whipped, and kept at the house of correction at work until she be sent away at her own charge... and for every Quaker, he or she, that shall a third time herein again offend, they shall have their tongue bored through with a hot iron....<sup>17</sup>

In addition, the General Court passed yet another anti-Quaker law a year later on October 19, 1658 that stated that the punishment for a Quaker violating the law a fourth time "shall be sentenced to banishment upon pain of death."<sup>18</sup> The authorities felt threatened by the rising number of Quakers and they thought stricter laws would prevent Quaker activity. Records of exactly how many Quakers were residing in Massachusetts do not exist, but at least a couple hundred visited or lived in the area.

The case of Dyer and Burden is telling. They both were married to non-Quakers, had children, were in their forties, had some kind of wealth, and were former residents of Boston. These women were not young, single women who had nothing to lose advocating their religious devotion. They were average middling class mothers of the seventeenth century. Interestingly, the authorities did not sentence them to any kind of corporal punishment (as the laws prescribed); they were instead released and asked to leave the jurisdiction of the Bay Colony.<sup>19</sup> The story of Ann Burden's presence in Massachusetts ended, but Mary Dyer continued to witness Quaker beliefs and she returned on three more occasions.

Dyer returned two years later in 1659 to visit fellow Quakers who were imprisoned for witnessing in Massachusetts. She was arrested, imprisoned, and then banished upon pain of death by the Court of Assistants on September 12, 1659.<sup>20</sup> Mary Dyer's husband, William, wrote a letter to the Court of Assistants pleading for her release. William indicated the horrible



### Unbowed

This image by painter Howard Pyle depicts Mary Dyer in prayer. The illustration accompanied an article in *McClure's* magazine published in 1906.

conditions his wife had to endure while in prison. He wrote: "It is a sad condition that New England professors are come unto, in exercising such cruelties toward their fellow creatures and sufferers...what inhumanity is this, had you never wives of your own...."<sup>21</sup> William continued his protest for several pages, which convinced the court to release his wife.

Less than a month later, Dyer returned to Boston to visit another imprisoned cohort, Christopher Holder. She was again imprisoned, brought

to trial, and sentenced to execution by hanging with fellow Quakers, William Robbinson and Marmaduke Stephenson.<sup>22</sup> Before the sentence was implemented, the Court records indicated that Dyer's son petitioned the court and he convinced the authorities to rescind the death penalty for his mother. Dyer's cohorts, however, were still hanged on October 27, 1659.

Incidentally, Dyer was forced to walk with them to the gallows, stand on the scaffolding, and watch her friends be hanged before she was released. Before leaving Boston, she sent a letter to the General Court in protest. Dyer wrote: "In obedience to the Lord, whom I serve with my spirit, and in pity to your souls, which you neither know nor pity, I can do no less than once more to warn you to put away the evil of your doings, and 'kiss the Son,' the light in you..."<sup>23</sup> After this dramatic episode, Dyer returned home to Rhode Island, but not for long. On May 21, 1660 she revisited Boston to preach Quakerism. She was subsequently arrested, brought before the court, and sentenced to death by hanging, which was carried out on June 1, 1660.<sup>24</sup> This middle-aged, married mother of six children became the first and only Quaker woman to be executed by hanging in New England.

Dyer became a symbol of martyrdom to Quakers. To the Puritan authorities, however, this became a troublesome incident that needed to be justified to the newly restored monarch, Charles II, the new King of England.<sup>25</sup> Since King Charles II issued the "Declaration of Breda," which promised more religious liberty for various Christian groups, the Massachusetts Puritans decided to send a letter to the King to justify the execution of Dyer and other Quakers. The Court of Assistants explained: "The Quakers died, not because of their other crimes...but upon their superadded presumptuous and incorrigible contempt for authority..."<sup>26</sup> The court wanted the King to know that they executed them for political reasons, not religious. Nevertheless, in 1661, the King sent an order to Massachusetts Governor John Endicott (c.1589–1665) to stop persecuting the Quakers, to which the Governor responded by releasing Quakers currently in prison. After a year, Quakers were again imprisoned and punished for their "crimes." However, no one else was hanged for being a Quaker.

## **ENGLISH QUAKER WOMEN BRAVE PURITAN PUNISHMENTS**

Many other Quaker women arrived in Massachusetts during Mary Dyer's visits. Mary Clark, a married mother from London, left her family and traveled to Boston and delivered her Quaker message in 1657. She was arrested and sentenced to twelve weeks in prison and twenty lashes. Clark was then forced out of the colony in the middle of winter. Quaker George

Bishop's *New England Judged By the Spirit of the Lord* (1703) described the incident: "Mary Clark...whose tender body ye mercilessly tore, on the 24th of the sixth month, 1657, with twenty stripes of a whip with three cords, laid on with fury, after she had delivered her message..."<sup>27</sup> Clark continued to witness her Quaker beliefs in New Amsterdam, but she died as a result of a shipwreck in 1658. Clark was a middle-aged wife of a merchant-tailor who upheld the values of marriage and motherhood but felt compelled to spread Quaker beliefs in colonial America.<sup>28</sup>

In 1658, two Quaker women, Herodias (Harriet or Hored) Long Gardner and Mary Staunton, arrived in Weymouth, MA from Newport, RI to voice their views. Gardner was in her thirties, married, and eventually birthed ten children, one of whom was with her. The young and single Staunton was with Gardner to help with her infant child. Gardner and Staunton were imprisoned for two weeks, sentenced to ten lashes, and then "warned out" into the wildness so they were forced to walk sixty miles back to Newport.<sup>29</sup> These two women were fairly average women of the time who both felt compelled to witness to Puritans in Massachusetts.

Another Quaker woman, Katherine Scott of Providence, RI, arrived in Boston in 1658 to visit several imprisoned men who had had their ears cropped for being Quakers.<sup>30</sup> Her contemporaries described Scott, the sister of the infamous Anne Hutchinson, as an "ancient," married woman with at least three children. She was married to Richard, a well-known Quaker, and their three daughters, Patience, Mary, and Hannah, became avid Quakers. Katherine Scott was arrested once she arrived in Boston, imprisoned, sentenced to ten lashes, and then banished upon pain of death.<sup>31</sup> Scott returned home, but her eleven-year old daughter, Patience, arrived in June of 1659 with several other Quakers, including Mary Dyer, to protest against the colonial officials. Since she was so young, the authorities released her and she was sent back to Rhode Island without punishment.<sup>32</sup> Patience's sister, Mary, was the next member of the Scott family to arrive in the Bay Colony. Mary Scott, engaged to imprisoned Quaker Christopher Holder, arrived late in 1659 with Alice Couland, a married mother from Rhode Island. The records indicated that they went to Boston to visit their fellow Quakers in prison and to wrap the bodies of Robbinson and Stevenson after they were hanged. Scott and Couland were imprisoned but the court records indicated they were both admonished and required to leave the jurisdiction of the colony within five days.<sup>33</sup>

Several more female Quakers arrived in Massachusetts in 1660. A pregnant woman, Jane Nicholson, and her husband traveled from England to spread their Quaker views. They were both imprisoned for eighteen weeks

and banished upon pain of death.<sup>34</sup> The Court Records indicate that they were arrested again a few weeks later and they asked to be released on the condition that they would leave the colony for England. The authorities agreed to this arrangement. The record indicates: “the Court granted liberty to the aforesaid persons [Joseph and Jane Nicholson] for three dates [*sic*] to depart this jurisdiction, either for England or elsewhere....”<sup>35</sup> The court allowed this extension because the Nicholsons needed time to arrange for their departure from the colony, which showed leniency was given to some Quakers.

Another female Quaker arrived in Boston in 1660, Mary Wright. She came from Oyster Bay, Long Island and she was a single eighteen-year-old at the time, but she eventually married a Quaker. She traveled to Boston to protest the execution of Mary Dyer and she was banished upon pain of death. Mary had two sisters who also traveled to Boston to protest against Puritans. Hannah Wright arrived in 1665 when she was about thirteen and single. She traveled with other Quakers, was imprisoned, and then sent away. Another younger sister, Lydia Wright, arrived in 1677 at the age of twenty-two. She appeared in sackcloth in a Boston Church to protest against Puritans.<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, these three sisters were not whipped for their actions like several other female Quakers.<sup>37</sup>

In 1661, two married Quaker women, Elizabeth Hooton and Joan Broksopp, both in their sixties, arrived in the Bay Colony together to visit fellow imprisoned believers. They were both married to Quakers and Hooton had six grown children. Evidence suggests that they had some kind of wealth since they paid for their trip to New England and they were literate.<sup>38</sup> Hooton wrote numerous letters to fellow Quakers and authored several essays about her Quaker beliefs. Broksopp also wrote letters throughout her lifetime.<sup>39</sup> The authorities arrested both Hooton and Broksopp and banished them from the colony and left them in the wilderness. Broksopp did not return to Massachusetts but Hooton returned in 1662 with a license from the King “to purchase land in any of his plantations beyond the seas.”<sup>40</sup> The General Court refused to allow Hooton to buy any house and along with her daughter was arrested, jailed, put in stocks, whipped, and then banished into the wilderness. Hooton visited the Bay Colony a few more times until she eventually returned to England around 1665.<sup>41</sup> The Hootons caused the Bay Colony authorities much aggravation as evidenced by the numerous punishments they endured.

There were a few other female Quakers who arrived in Massachusetts. Catharine Chatham in 1661 was thirty years old and married to a fellow Quaker. She appeared in sackcloth and, as a result, was imprisoned, whipped,

and banished in the middle of the winter. Two other women, Mary Tomkins and Alice Ambrose, came from England and then Rhode Island to profess their Quaker beliefs. Little is known about who they were, but they were whipped for their actions and they continued witnessing in other colonies,; not in Massachusetts. Margaret Brewster also arrived in Massachusetts and she was married to a Quaker. She came from Barbados and dressed in sackcloth and attended church. She was whipped for her actions.<sup>42</sup>

Overall, these twenty-six visiting women caused quite a stir in Massachusetts. Over half of the women were married or engaged and they tended to be about twenty years old. These women were also convincing since some Massachusetts residents became Quakers. Resident female Quakers tell a different story about who these women were and the way the authorities dealt with them.

### **HOMEGROWN QUAKERS: SEEDS OF A MOVEMENT**

Resident Quakers, those who converted while living in Massachusetts, almost always were married and they converted as families. Seventeen out of eighteen were married, and fourteen to confirmed Quakers. These women also tended to come from families of Quakers and they were usually around twenty or thirty years old. Their crimes and punishments varied, but the most common crime was not attending church services and their punishments were most likely fines, but no consistent monetary amount.

A nascent Quaker movement began in Salem in 1657–1658 with several prominent families who “found” their “light within.” By the 1660s, estimates indicate that over 50 Salem residents became Quakers out of a population of about 1000.<sup>43</sup> Cassandra and Lawrence Southwick were heads of a prominent Salem Quaker family who incurred numerous fines for nonattendance of church services, suffered imprisonment, whippings, and ear cropping, and two of their younger children were ordered to be sold into servitude to pay outstanding fines.<sup>44</sup> They settled in Salem in 1639, became full members of the First Church of Salem, had a business manufacturing glass, and owned land.<sup>45</sup> They became Quakers in 1656–1657. Cassandra and Lawrence were eventually banished upon pain of death and they moved to Shelter Island and died soon after their arrival. Their children, however, stayed in Massachusetts.

Their daughter, Mary Southwick, married Henry Trask and converted him to Quakerism. After Henry died, Mary married another Quaker, William Nichols. Mary was born in 1630 and she was actively protesting in the Bay Colony in 1659 and 1660, while she was in her thirties. She eventually had

at least four children. Mary was fined on several occasions, but also arrested for preaching, which led to imprisonment and whippings.<sup>46</sup>

The youngest daughter of the Southwick family, Provided, was born in 1641 and appeared in court records from 1659 to 1660. Provided was fined for nonattendance at public meetings and for disturbing the peace for preaching Quakerism.<sup>47</sup> Eventually, Provided and her brother, Daniel, were to be sold into servitude in Virginia or Barbados because they failed to pay fines and they falsely claimed they did not have estate assets to pay the fines.<sup>48</sup> Evidently they were not sold into servitude because they appear in court records for several years as residents of the Bay Colony. Provided married a small farmer and fellow Quaker, Samuel Gaskill, in 1662 and eventually birthed at least four children.<sup>49</sup> Provided seemed to fulfill the role of a typical seventeenth-century wife and mother.

Ann Needham, a married and pregnant Salem resident, was arrested for attending a Quaker meeting with her husband, Anthony. She appears in the court records in 1658 and 1661, but was released because she was pregnant. She and her husband, however, did accrue fines for not attending Puritan church services.<sup>50</sup> Little evidence indicated that they were punished any more than fines. Perhaps they rescinded their Quaker beliefs or moved away.

Four sisters from the Shattuck family, Gertrude, Hannah, Sarah, and Damaris, were active Quakers through the late 1650s and early 1660s. Their Quaker father, Samuel, was a Salem felt-maker/hatter.<sup>51</sup> The sisters were in their twenties and thirties and all married Quakers and had several children. The only formal charges against them included nonattendance at Puritan church services. They were all fined on many occasions, but no further punishments were recorded. Evidence shows that the authorities tolerated these sisters and their Quaker husbands.<sup>52</sup> It could be because they paid their fines and did not violate any other laws.

Several other Quaker women were brought up on charges for not attending Puritan church services. Elizabeth Kitchin, a thirty-year old mother of Salem, was fined on several occasions along with her Quaker husband. Another Quaker woman, Tamosin Ward Buffum, was in her fifties with nine children. Buffum was fined for nonattendance of church services several times also with her husband. Rebecca Perkins Hussey was in her mid-twenties with at least three children when she was fined and her house was searched for Quaker literature. Deborah Harper was in her thirties with some children, but no punishments were recorded. Mary Miles, a Salem resident, interrupted a Boston church to protest against the Puritans, but no punishments were recorded.<sup>53</sup>

## “GOING NAKED AS A SIGN”

In 1665, two women were arrested and punished for appearing “naked” in public.<sup>54</sup> According to historian Kenneth Carroll’s “Early Quakers and ‘Going Naked as a Sign’” (1978), “going naked as a sign” is one of the least understood aspects of early Quakerism. Carroll quotes from a letter written by George Fox in 1652, which gives a reason why some Quakers decided to “go naked:” “the Lord made one to go naked among you, a figure of thy nakedness, and of your nakedness, and a sign amongst you before your destruction cometh, that you might see that you were naked and not covered with the truth.”<sup>55</sup> Only a few women in Massachusetts chose this form of protest.

Lydia Perkins Wardell “went in naked among them” in a Newbury church to protest against her husband’s punishments for being a Quaker. Quaker writer, George Bishop in his work, *New England Judged By the Spirit of Lord* (1703), described Wardell as “a young, tender, and chaste woman, seeing the wickedness of your priests and rulers to her husband, was not at all offended at the Truth, but as your wickedness abounded so she withdrew...and, as a sign to them, she went in naked among them...”<sup>56</sup> She was in her thirties with at least three children at the time of her actions.

Deborah Buffum Wilson of Marblehead “walked naked” through the streets of Salem to protest against Puritan punishments of Quakers. Bishop’s *New England Judged* states that Wilson decided to “go naked” as “a sign of their [the town’s] hard-heartedness, cruelty, and immodesty, in stripping and whipping of women as they had done.”<sup>57</sup> This twenty-year-old woman with at least two children was whipped for her actions.<sup>58</sup>

## RESIDENT QUAKER WOMEN’S LIGHTER PUNISHMENTS

Evidence reveals that resident Quaker women were usually married with children and received mild punishments relative to visiting Quakers from other regions. These resident Quakers usually protested by not attending Puritan church services, which resulted in fines. The women who protested by “going naked” were punished, but not banished upon pain of death.

This evidence indicates that seventeenth-century Quaker women in Massachusetts were usually literate, married mothers of middling social/economic status in their twenties or thirties who protested against Puritan authorities of the colony. They protested in various ways including simply arriving in the colony, not attending Puritan church services, preaching in the streets, having Quaker literature, and even appearing naked in public.



They challenged the common Christian belief that women were not to preach God's word. However, religious conviction seemed to be their driving force rather than the rejection of seventeenth-century gender roles. Quakers made it easier for women to gain power without completely rejecting typical gender roles. Inadvertently, they began to challenge the role of women in society, which laid the groundwork for future reform movements. Quaker women were an important group who mobilized support for various nineteenth-century reform movements including Women's Rights, Abolitionism, and education and prison reform.

HJM

## Notes

1. Rosemary Moore, *The Light in Their Consciences: The Early Quakers in Britain 1646-1666* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 34.
2. Barry Reay, *The Quakers and the English Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 20. Alan Cole, "The Social Origins of the Early Friends," *Journal of the Friends Historical Society* 48 (1957), 99-118. Adrian Davies, *The Quakers in English Society, 1655-1725* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 140-155. David Booy, *Autobiographical Writings by Early Quaker Women* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 10. Hugh Barbour, *The Quakers in Puritan England* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1964), 72. Catie Gill, *Women in the Seventeenth-Century Quaker Community* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 29.
3. Carla Gardina Pestana, "The City Upon a Hill Under Siege," 333-335, 347. In part, this issue revolves about the definition of "middling" social/economic status. Pestana considers farmers to be of the lower class, but many English historians consider small farmers to be of the middling class. See Reay, Cole, Davies, and Barbour.
4. See the Appendix for a chart on the data collected from the *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay Colony*, the *Records of the Court of Assistants*, the *Records and Files of Essex County*, and various Quaker sources.
5. Jonathan Chu, *Neighbors, Friends, or Madmen: The Puritan Adjustment to Quakerism in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts Bay* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), 163.
6. Larry Gragg, *The Quaker Community on Barbados: Challenging the Culture of the Planter Class* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 22, 37, 42. Mary Fisher spent several months on Barbados before traveling to New England. There are several examples of other Quakers doing the same before moving to other places to spread their Quaker beliefs. The Governor of Barbados, Daniel Searle, allowed for some religious tolerance during the 1650s mainly because he wanted to encourage settlement and minimize religious strife among settlers so economic endeavors could

prevail. Some itinerants found the inhabitants on Barbados open to Quaker teachings and this attracted more Quakers to visit the island. Most Quakers, however, did not stay on the island for long. They moved to other places to spread their Quaker message.

7. *Governor's Council Executive Records*, July 10, 1656, Volume 1, part of Council Records, Massachusetts Archives. Humphrey Norton, *New-England's Ensigne*, 5-7. George Bishop, *New England Judged By the Spirit of the Lord*, 9-16. George Selleck's work, *Quakers in Boston 1656-1964: Three Centuries of Friends in Boston and Cambridge* indicated that Mary Fisher was in her thirties. However, Rufus M. Jones in his work, *The Quakers in the American Colonies*, indicated she was in her twenties. According to Pestana, Mary Fisher married twice and eventually settled in South Carolina with her second husband. Pestana, *The City upon a Hill*, 345. Mary Fisher was of the lower class being that she was a servant but evidence of Austin's social/economic position is unclear. The records of Margaret Fell indicate that money was given to Fisher and Austin to help pay for their passage. Brailsford, 112.

8. While the governor of Massachusetts was away, Governor Endicott the Deputy-Governor took charge and had Austin and Fisher strip-searched to see if they had markings of "witches." This is the only known case in the Massachusetts Bay Colony that involved Quakers being accused of witchcraft. No markings were found and the authorities dropped the issue. The account appears in Humphrey Norton, *New-England Ensigne* (London, 1659), 6-7.

9. *Records of The Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, ed. Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, Volume IV—Part I, 1650-1660, 277.

10. "A Lyst of the pasingers Abord [sic] The Speedwell of London, Robert Lock Master, Bound for New England." Found in *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* Volume I. Ed. Rev. William Cogswell. Boston, MA: Samuel Drake Publisher, 1847. This list indicated their ages as follows: Mary Prince, 21; Sarah Gibbons, 21; Mary Weatherhead (Witherhead), 26; and Dorothy Waugh, 20. Waugh was literate since she authored an essay in 1655 titled: "A Relation concerning Dorothy Waugh's Cruel usage by the Mayor of Carlisle." Booy, 201.

11. George Bishop, *New England Judged by the Spirit of the Lord* (1703), 9.

12. Shurtleff, ed. *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, 278.

13. Shurtleff, ed. *Records of the The Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, Volume IV—Part I, 1650-1660, 277-278.

14. *Records of the MA Colony*, 277.

15. Horatio Rogers, *Mary Dyer of Rhode Island: The Quaker Martyr That Was Hanged on Boston Common, June 1, 1660* (Providence, RI: Preston and Rounds, 1896), 31-35. William Dyer is listed as one of the Deputies in the General Assembly of Newport in the *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, in New England*. Volume II 1664-1677. Ed. John Russell Bartlett (Providence, RI, 1857), 23.

16. Bishop, *New England Judged*, 42-44. According to Bishop, Ann Burden was a 16-year resident of the Bay Colony before she, her husband, and children moved to

England. Burden's husband then died in England and she returned to claim debts that were owed to her husband's estate.

17. Shurtleff, ed. *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, 308-309.

18. Shurtleff, ed. *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, 346.

19. Mary Dyer and Ann Burden are not mentioned in Shurtleff's *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England* or the *Records of the Court of Assistants* for this encounter with the authorities. Mary Dyer does appear several times later on in the records.

20. *Records of the Court of Assistants of the Colony of the Massachusetts Bay 1630–1692*, Volume III, September 12, 1659, 68–69. Court Files, Suffolk, NO. 329, 3rd Paper. William Robbinson, Marmaduke Stephenson, and Nicholas Davis were also sentenced to banishment upon pain of death on this day.

21. William Dyer, *Letter to Courts of Assistants*, 30 August 1659.

22. Shurtleff, ed. *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, 383-384.

23. Bishop, *New England Judged*, 188.

24. Shurtleff, ed. *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, 419.

25. The Massachusetts Bay Colony authorities found it necessary to defend the executions of Mary Dyer and three male Quakers. The letter indicated that they acted in self-defense because these Quakers were not only against the Church but also the civil government. The letter can be found in Shurtleff's, *The Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, 450-452.

26. Shurtleff, ed. *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, 451.

27. Bishop, *New England Judged*, 44–45.

28. Bishop, *New England Judged*, 44–45. Besse, *Sufferings of Early Quakers*, 181–182.

29. Bishop, *New England Judged*, 52–53.

30. The General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony passed a law on October 14, 1657, that indicated that any male Quaker who entered the colony would have one of his ears cut off, called "ear cropping." The punishment of ear cropping was reserved solely for male Quakers. Shurtleff, *The Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay*, 308-309. Bishop, *New England Judged*, 79. There are only a few cases in the record indicating this kind of punishment was administered.

31. Bishop, *New England Judged*, 79.

32. *Records of the Court of Assistants*, 68-69. Bishop, *New England Judged*, 95.

33. Shurtleff, ed. *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, 410–411.

34. Shurtleff, ed. *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, 419, 433–434.

35. Shurtleff, ed. *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, 433.
36. Kenneth Carroll, "Sackcloth and Ashes and Other Signs and Wonders." *The Journal of the Friends' Historical Society*, Vol. 53 No. 4 (1975). Carroll argues that Quakers "appeared in sackcloth" to protest because of the biblical passage in *Revelation* 11:31. "And I have two witnesses, whom I shall appoint to prophesy, dressed in sackcloth."
37. Bishop, *New England Judged*, 169, 211, 304.
38. James Bowden, *The History of the Society of Friends in America*, 2 vols., 1850-1854, 256. Bowden indicated that the Society of Friends did not pay for Hooton and Broksopp to travel to New England. Bowden described Hooton: "She was in very sufficient circumstances."
39. Many of Hooton's writings can be found in the Swarthmore Collections in Swarthmore, PA. For more information on Hooton's writings see Barker, "An Exploration of Quaker Women's Writings Between 1650 and 1700," *Journal of International Women's Studies*, Volume 5, March 2004, pp 8-20.
40. Bishop, *New England Judged*, 265. Besse, 228. Manners, 39.
41. Besse, *Sufferings of Early Quakers*, 228-230.
42. Besse, *Sufferings of Early Quakers*, 261-265.
43. Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts*, 25, 28-29.
44. *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Massachusetts*, Volume II, 103-106. Shurtleff, ed. *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, 349, 366-367.
45. James M. Caller and M.A. Ober, *Genealogy of the Descendants of Lawrence and Cassandra Southwick of Salem, Massachusetts* (Salem, MA: J.H. Choate and Co. Printers, 1881), 65.
46. *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Massachusetts* Volume II, 103-106. Shurtleff, ed. *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, 410-411, 433.
47. *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Massachusetts* Volume II, 103-106, 202, 224, 315. Shurtleff, *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, 410-411.
48. Shurtleff, *Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England*, 366. No evidence indicated that they were sold into servitude; Provided and Daniel continue to appear in court records after this sentence.
49. Caller and Ober, *Genealogy of the Descendants of Lawrence and Cassandra Southwick of Salem, Mass.*, 69, 77-78.
50. *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Massachusetts*, Volume II, 103-106.
51. *A Genealogical Register of the First Settlers of New England*, Ed. John Farmer. (Lancaster, MA: Carter, Andrews & Co., 1829).
52. *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Massachusetts*, Volume II, 105, 106.
53. *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Massachusetts*, Volume II, 103-106.

54. Kenneth L. Carroll, "Early Quakers and 'Going Naked as a sign.'" *Quaker History*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (Autumn, 1978): 69–87.
55. Carroll, "Early Quakers and 'Going Naked as a sign,'" 76.
56. Bishop, *New England Judged*, 239.
57. Bishop, *New England Judged*, 244.
58. Besse, *Sufferings of Early Quakers*, 235–237. Bishop, *New England Judged*, 244.