

Quaker Artists

Did you know that James Michener and Anne Tyler are Quakers? That Joan Baez, Ben Kingsley and F. Murray Abraham attend Friends Meeting? That Bonnie Raitt and James Dean were raised Friends? That a Quaker Tapestry and Quaker stained glass exist? That Chinese Friends art exists? That Walt Whitman was influenced by Friends? That Margaret Fell wrote poetry?

The book *Quaker Artists* contains the stories of the above artists and more: 94 reviews in all, a history of Friends, a history of Quaker art, study questions, 27 illustrations, 30 reproductions of the artists' works and a bibliography. The period covered is 1659 to 1992. Poets, painters, dancers, musicians, films and 14 other categories are included.

Quaker Artists is an entertaining and celebratory read in itself but it has other uses, too: as a source for study groups, a reference for libraries and a curriculum for First Day Schools.

Gary Sandman, a member of Fifteenth Street Meeting in New York City, has published *Quaker Artists*, his first book, in a numbered and signed edition. Cost is \$16 (postage included). Check or money order should be made out to Gary Sandman, 25-26 18th St., Apt. 1F, Astoria NY 11102, 718-728-7372.

Here is a series of Gary's research into the variety and history of Quaker involvement in the arts.

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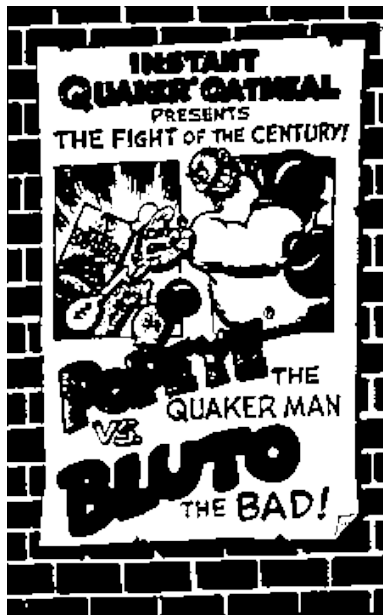
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Traditionally Quakers have been associated with the color gray or, to be more exact, "drab", which is a sort of yellowish-gray. The association between the two came from Friends of the Quietist era, who wore clothing woven from the wool of black and white sheep.

Quietist Friends found bright colors a distraction so they used gray to avoid excitement and keep to the Light. They also wore it as a badge that separated them from the World. In the Society's early years, however, Friends loved color. They did remove frivolous extras and refuse luxurious clothing but only as a testimony to simplicity. George Fox bought a crimson mantle for his wife, Margaret Fell.

As Quietism came, Margaret Fell herself decried Friends for not wearing clothes "the colors of the hills". Nowadays Quakers have come to rediscover what early Friends knew. While we aim at simplicity of dress, we join them in the bounty of color that God has provided us.



Popeye the Quaker Man was an advertising campaign created by the Quaker Oats Company and King Features Syndicate in 1989. "Instant Quaker Oats Presents the Fight of the Century: Popeye the Quaker Man vs. Bluto the Bad!", a pamphlet of cartoons, was one of their ads. (See left)

In it, Bluto hides a horseshoe in his glove and levels Popeye. Popeye rejects spinach, croaking "Can the spinach! I wants me Instant Quaker Oatmeal!" After he gobbles up his oatmeal, he knocks out Bluto. Wimpy, another character, holds up Popeye's hand and declares, "The winner and still champion... Popeye the Quaker Man!" As everyone cheers, Popeye sings, "I eats me oatmeal an' I'm stronger than steel. I'm Popeye the Quaker Man!" His parrot, perched on his shoulder, squawks "Popeye wants a Quaker!"

Friends across the country took exception to the Popeye the Quaker Man campaign. They didn't like the depiction of Quakers, however unlikely, as beating up people. They contacted Quaker Oats in great numbers. Embarrassed, the company withdrew the campaign.

James Turrell is a leading American artist. His work focuses on light. Examples include "Afrum-Proto", a projection cast into a room's corner that seems to float in space; "Amba", a rectangle cut into a wall that opens onto a room of misty light; "Second Meeting", a room minus the ceiling that opens to the sky; and "Roden Crater", an extinct volcano in Arizona that when completed will be filled with tunnels, viewing chambers and reflecting pools. His intent is perception itself: how do we experience light?

Turrell has produced over 120 one-man shows and taken part in over 115 group exhibitions on virtually every continent. He's been awarded numerous honors, including the Legion of Honor, a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship and a Guggenheim Fellowship. Several books, like *Long Green* and many articles, as in *Time* have been written about him. He appeared as the final artist in the BBC documentary "American Visions".

Turrell attends the Flagstaff (AZ) Meeting. He designed the Houston Meetinghouse, and his “Second Meeting” reminds one of a Meetinghouse. Turrell was raised a Conservative Friend in California and grew up wearing the plain dress. Conservative Friends generally avoid art, feeling that it’s a vain and creaturely pursuit, and therefore it’s remarkable that an artist of his caliber should emerge from this background.

I was enthralled with Turrell’s art. This was particularly brought home when I walked into my darkened kitchen and discovered that the cover of one of his books that he had kindly sent me glowed in the dark. How perfect that a Friend should work with Light!

“John Endicott”, a poetic tragedy, was written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. It depicts Puritan Governor John Endicott’s persecution of Friends in the 1660’s, which culminated in the hanging of Mary Dyer, Marmaduke Stephenson and William Robinson in Boston Commons. Longfellow began the writing the piece in 1856 at the suggestion of Emmanuel Vitalis Scherb, friend. In preparation he read widely in Quaker literature, including Beam’s “Suffering of the Quakers”. He encountered difficulty in the poem’s composition, however, and laid it away for almost ten years. In 1888 he rewrote it completely in blank verse, added another poem about the Salem witchcraft trials and entitled both “New England Tragedies”.

Longfellow (1807-1882) was, of course, the American poet. He is famous for his narrative poems “Evangeline”, “Hiawatha”, “The Courtship of Miles Standish” and “Tales at a Wayside Inn”, though his sonnets, such as “Cross of Snow”, are perhaps the better part of his verse. He was a friend of Whittier, with whom he corresponded frequently. He possessed a good collection of Quaker books, like Penn’s “Treatise on Oaths”.

The Richardson family represented three generations of Quaker silversmiths.

Francis (b. 1681) came from a wealthy family allied with the Philadelphia elite. He was probably apprenticed to a silversmith, per Penn’s laws, though this isn’t known for certain. As a child, he did know Phillip Synge, Jr., another silversmith, and he drew in the margins of his lessonbooks. By 1701 Francis was a well-known silversmith with a chop on Front Street, who worked in gold as well. He was famous for fashioning silver shoebuckles for Letitia Penn, William’s daughter. Another pair of shoebuckles made for the wedding slippers of Elizabeth Paschall rest now in the Pennsylvania Historical Society.

Joseph, Francis’ son, was considered to be the finest of the Richardson silversmiths. He was very active among Friends, including leadership in “The Friendly Society for Promoting Peace with the Indians by Pacific Measures”. In 1757 he struck medals that were presented to ‘Friendly Indians’.

Joseph Jr., and Nathaniel, Joseph's sons, were respected silversmiths, too. They were known for the ornaments they made for Native Americans. Joseph Jr. also built furniture as well as doll's furniture for his nieces.

(A tip of the broadbrim to Estelle Simms Hewson for the above information)

Anna Sewell (1820-1878) was the author of *Black Beauty*, one of the most popular books in the English language. A children's favorite, the story tells of a young boy and his horse. Sewell led an isolated life due to a childhood accident that left her confined largely to her house and sofa. Her solitude was broken, however, by the gentle support of her mother, visits by her friends and neighborhood children and the love she felt for animals. *Black Beauty* was written in her last years when she was in great pain. She died shortly after it was published and never knew of its great success.

Sewell was an English Friend who came of long Quaker ancestry. Her writing reflected the simplicity and directness that is the hallmark of much Friends literature. She spoke in the plain language, not only to people but to animals as well. One story recounts that when she was a young girl, a man shot a bird who fell into her family's garden. As he came toward the gate, she met him, crying, "No! Thee cruel man! Thee shan't have it at all!" Another story describes how when she rode her horse, she prompted it only with "Now thee must go a little faster; thee would be sorry for us to be late at the station". Sewell wrote *Black Beauty*, she stated, "to bring the thoughts of man into harmony with the purposes of God". She is buried in the Friends cemetery at Lamas, near Buxton, Norfolk.

Two groups of Quaker cabinetmakers flourished in America during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Traditionally Friends had owned plain serviceable furniture, in keeping with the testimony of simplicity. A chair of William Penn's, which has survived from his home, Pennsbury, reflects this. As American Quakers prospered, however, a market for more expensive furniture, was created.

In Philadelphia, about 1750, Quaker cabinetmakers began to construct costly English-influenced furniture. Their work was known for its carving and its use of proportion and plasticity. Since the cabinetmakers lived in a great mercantile city, they continued to open to London's inspiration, if due to the distance, they were always a little behind the fashion. At the same time, they developed a distinctive Philadelphia style. Beginning with pleasant Queen Anne furniture, they soon moved on to create magnificent examples of Chippendale. In their final years they built brilliant pieces of the Federal school.

William Savery (1721-1781) was among the earliest of these craftsmen. His work bridged Friends', Queen Anne and Chippendale, and it always remained fairly plain. He was quite popular and prosperous.

Thomas Affleck (1740-1795) created grandly ornate Chippendale pieces. A Loyalist during the Revolutionary War, he was banished to Virginia in 1777. Later he returned to Philadelphia and was even given the commission to build 30 chairs in the Federal style for the first United States' Congress, which are still on display in Independence Hall.

Benjamin Randolph, who was active from 1762 to 1785, worked in the Philadelphia Chippendale style too, but also built perhaps the first piece in the Federal school. This was the famous "Independence Desk", a plain portable desk upon which Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence. An ardent Patriot and Fighting Quaker, Randolph was the friend of Jefferson, and George and Martha Washington, and served as an artillery ordnance officer during the war.

Also to be noted are Ephraim Haines (working 1775-1811); David Evans, John Letchworth (active 1785-1809) and the Claypooles.

In Newport, about the same time, Quaker cabinetmakers also began to construct Chippendale furniture and quickly settled on a style known as "blockfront." They would continue to hold fast to this long after fashion had changed. Their pieces tended to be more plain and bulky than those of Philadelphia.

The Goddard-Townsend clan, 23 cabinetmakers in three generations, held sway in Newport. Job Townsend (1699-1785) was the first of this group, but it was John Goddard (b. 1723), who married Job's daughter and began their real dominance. Goddard led in creating the blockfront style and was also known for his secretary desks, which for years were called "Rhode Island desks."

Townsend relatives were John, (b. 1732), Christopher, Edmund (1736-1811) and John II, Christopher's son. Goddard relatives included James; John's brother, and Thomas (1765-1858) and Stephen, both John's sons.

A sidelight to the above: through these years rural Friends tended to maintain furniture in Friends' traditional plainness. This hinted at growing divisions between city and country Friends that would lead to the Great Separations.

Quaker cabinetmakers did not last, it is sad to note. As Quietism came on strongly in the 1770s, Philadelphia Friends rejected the elaborate furniture in their midst. They eldered and even disowned members who possessed such items. Many pieces were stripped of their decoration. Thomas Savery, William's son, did not become a cabinetmaker, but instead worked as a tanner. (He also worked as a minister and went on to convert Elizabeth Fry into a Plain Friend.)

Newport Friends not only were affected by Quietism, but suffered because of that city's economic decline after the Revolutionary War. By 1825 the craft had passed out of their hands.

On the whole, I find myself ambivalent about this story. I'm drawn to the beauty of this furniture, it is glorious.

And yet, even so, I'm committed, to Friends' belief in simplicity, and I'm uncomfortable with objects made just for the wealthy. For, while Friends have never had a testimony for poverty, what of Woolman's question: "May we look upon... the furniture of our houses... and try whether the seeds of war have nourishment in these our possessions?"

Sword of Peace is one of the many outdoor dramas produced across the United States. Outdoor drama was created by University of North Carolina professor and playwright Paul Greene in 1937 with his "Lost Colony". Blending history, theater, music and dance and presented in open air amphitheaters, he called it "Symphonic Drama". Ninety-two companies now exist, playing to three million people yearly.

Sword of Peace concerns Quaker heritage in the Carolinas and the conflicts with which Friends struggled during the Revolutionary War. Presented by the Snow Camp Historical Society in rural North Carolina since 1973, with a cast of 58 and a small budget, from June through August, it's largely a volunteer effort by the community. It was written by William Hardy, who researched local Quaker Meetings and used real names to create his characters. James Wilson, a Friend, is the producer and plays the Quaker general Nathaniel Greene.

(A tip of the broadbrim to Nell McCracken for informing me about it.)

Samuel Lucas (1805-1870) of Hitchin, England, had a passion for painting. He began drawing as a child and continued his efforts while apprenticed to a shipowner in London as a teenager, visiting art galleries and studying Reynolds's "Discourses." His early work consisted of inks, chalks and washes, with little color.

In 1828 Lucas started exhibiting at the Royal Gallery and later on visited galleries in Europe, paying special attention to Rubens and Vandyke. After he entered the family brewery business, Lucas persevered, even stopping on the way to Monthly Meeting to paint. His work grew to include oils and watercolors, and many of his sketches of Hitchin and its people are on display at the British Museum.

A Friend, Lucas was discouraged in his painting right from the start. His father forbade drawing lessons, and other Quakers spoke in opposition to his art. He himself gave up portrait painting because of Friends tradition against it.

Samuel Lucas once stated, "If I had been born without hands, I must none the less have painted with my feet." With his passion he might have developed into a first-rate painter. What a tragedy Friends did not support his art.

The Intolerants, a play printed in Philadelphia in 1827, portrays the conflict between Friends during the period when they were separating into the Hicksite and Orthodox factions. It's a neo-Shakespearean drama, in rhymed verse, with many touches of humor. The author is anonymous but appears to have been a New York Quaker of some learning and experience and a Hicksite.

In the play eight Orthodox Friends from New York secretly compose a letter warning Philadelphia Friends of Elias Hicks' impending visit, one of the insisting, "Say also that he is a cannibal." They also conspire with a traveling English mister, providing him with a list of contracts in Philadelphia, while in turn the English minister promises to inform the "Mother Church" in London about Hicks' heresies. The letter, however, falls into the wrong hands and is published. Thomas Eddy, the Orthodox leader, thereupon threatens exposure of the others, if they don't persevere. As the play ends, one of the other Orthodox cautions the rest not to be overzealous but rather to bide their time.

The Intolerants is a sad piece to read. The humor is sharp and uncharitable, the Orthodox Friends being depicted as greedy and pretentious, and individual Orthodox being skewered in personal attacks. (One is called "a huge carcass"). The hard-heartedness of Friends to one another is plain.

Oddly, the poetry is rather good. And the existence of the play itself is somewhat remarkable since drama was anathema to Friends then.

A painful souvenir of those days.

Rex Stout (1886-1975) is, of course, famous as the creator of the Nero Wolfe mysteries. Like his eccentric detective, he was a prodigiously talented man: mathematics genius, sailor, pulp writer, businessman, activist (with the *New Masses*, the ACLU, the Authors' Guild and Vanguard Press), avant-garde novelist, architect, craftsman, chef and gardener. He continued vigorous and dynamic into his eighty-fifth year.

Stout came from a long line of German, Irish and English Quakers. His forebears settled in Pennsylvania and North Carolina, eventually migrating to Indiana, where they became prominent in the Underground Railroad and in their communities. His parents were strong Friends, who used the plain language, and his mother, in particular, was fervent in the faith.

In neither of the small Indiana and Kansas towns Stout was raised in were there Quaker Meeting or neighbors, however. And he became an agnostic at the age of 11. Even so, asked at 83 when he had ceased being a Friend, he replied "I still think of myself as a Quaker, which may sound silly but isn't. Quaker background and influence must be an essential part of me...."

Recently, while browsing in the Richland County Library shelves, I discovered a delightful little volume called *Quaker Idyls*. It's a series of short sketches about 18th and 19th century Friends from Philadelphia, New York and Boston. Sarah M. H. Gardner is the author; it was originally

published in 1894. The book is charmingly and delicately rendered, reminding me of the tales I've heard from elderly Friends about their childhoods within Quaker communities largely separated from the world.

Gardner remains an unknown. I've been unable to find any information on her. Presumably she came from the milieu she describes.

Quaker Idyls, by its very existence, is unusual; traditionally Friends maintained a strong testimony against fiction. And yet this book emerged in the midst of that ban. What a graceful little first flowering of Quaker stories.

Thee, Hannah! published in 1940 by Marguerite de Angeli, concerns a young Quaker girl who desperately wants fancy clothes to wear. She learns to accept plain dress and to be proud of being a Quaker when her family saves a runaway slave.

Marguerite de Angeli (1889-1987) wrote and illustrated over thirty books for young people. Her family was a vital source of inspiration for her work; the struggle of minorities and immigrants was also a central theme. She won copious prizes, including the Newberry Medal in 1950 and the Lewis Carroll Shelf Award in 1961.

De Angeli was not a Friend. Moving to Philadelphia as a young person, though, she became good friends with Elizabeth Grey Vining, for whom she illustrated *Meggy McIntosh*, and with Violet Grey, Elizabeth's sister, who helped her research *Thee, Hannah!* at Friends Library. *Thee, Hannah!* was inspired by a 92-year-old Moorestown, New Jersey Quaker woman with whom de Angeli was acquainted. In addition, de Angeli wrote *Jared's Island*, which has some Quaker characters.

I found de Angeli's books charming. Her drawings, especially the pastels of *Henner's Lydia*, were delightful. And I admired her stories of minorities and immigrants, whose tales she pioneered in the field of children's literature.

Early Friends displayed an ambivalent attitude toward music. They were on fire to worship authentically and, when moved by the Spirit, they sang. George Fox recorded in his journal that when beaten by the jailer at Carlisle Gaol, he sang "in the power of the Lord." In fact, when the jailer then seized a fiddle and began to play, hoping to drown him out, Fox sang so movingly that the jailer was forced to stop.

Additionally, William Penn's first wife, Gulielma, was known to have played her lute for the poet Milton. The Friends' Meeting in the Kendal district of northwestern England customarily sang as a congregation; one of its leaders, Thomas Holme, was famous for his singing. A few substitutes seemed to have existed, too. Some Meetings, as a Friend ministered, responded with what were called "soundings, sensible groanings and reverent singing", much as one would hear

in a Baptist church nowadays. When some Friends ministered, they added a rhythmic lilt to their words, which the English called “intoning” or we Americans called the “sing-song”. (I’ve heard thus used by older Friends even nowadays.)

And yet this same dedication to authenticity led most early Friends to reject singing hymns, singing in congregations or choirs, and playing instruments. They felt singing hymns might not be spontaneous, and that singing the Psalms marred the original intent with a foreign meter and rhythm. When people sang as a group in a congregation or choir, not all might be led to by the Spirit. And when people played instruments, it was “artificial”, that is, produced by what persons had made, rather than by voices, which God had made.

Because much of the secular music of the age was licentious, Friends rejected it. Solomon Eccles, a tremendously talented musician who destroyed his instruments, symbolized this. Fox witnessed against music at a fair.

In time, Friends ceased to sing or play music altogether. Condemnation of music was even written into the Discipline. A great error we would not correct until the present day.

The cutting of silhouettes, or scissors art, was once a prominent Quaker activity. Early Friends had rejected portraiture; they considered it vain and preferred to be remembered for their lives, as recorded in their journals, literature and Meeting records. Gradually, however, this testimony relaxed, and by the late 1700’s profile paintings, usually in silhouette, were permitted. Cheap and easy to make, and with the Quietist costume convenient to copy, they soon grew popular with Friends. Practitioners ranged from amateurs, often anonymous, to well-known artists, like Patience Wright, a New Jersey Quaker; William Henry Brown, a South Carolina Quaker; and Auguste Edouart, who was not a Friend though he cut many Quakers. Various media were employed: paper and scissors; India ink on glass; and paint on paper, sometimes enhanced by gold or white ink. Medallions done in metal or wax were also produced. As the art developed, hollow cuts - white figures on black backgrounds, usually cut on a machine called a physiognotrace and often decorated with a quill pen or pencil - became fashionable. Generally, people, animals and objects were depicted, and as artists’ skill grew, group pictures, often with a predrawn lithograph background, were added. The Peale Museum of Philadelphia, c. 1800, became a prominent repository of this art. The invention of photography killed the art of silhouettes, and most silhouettes have vanished due to their fragility though some have survived in homes, libraries and museums, protected for decades or even centuries in portfolios.