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"In this Time of Close Trial": An Examination of Quaker Women's Roles and Political Activism in Philadelphia, September 1777-April 1778

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"IN THIS TIME OF CLOSE TRIAL:" AN EXAMINATION OF QUAKER WOMEN'S
ROLES AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN PHILADELPHIA, SEPTEMBER 1777-

APRIL 1778

by

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B.A. May 2007, Virginia Wesleyan College

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HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

“IN THIS TIME OF CLOSE TRIAL:” AN EXAMINATION OF QUAKER WOMEN’S ROLES AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN PHILADELPHIA, SEPTEMBER 1777- APRIL 1778

Kimberly Ann Stinedurf
Old Dominion University, 2009
Director: Dr. Carolyn Lawes

This study examines the flexibility of Quaker women’s roles in their domestic, sacred, and secular communities. It traces the experiences of a group of Philadelphia Quaker wives and mothers who were forced to support their families when revolutionary authorities arrested and banished their husbands to Virginia during the American Revolution. First, it investigates Quaker women’s duties in their households and suggests that gendered responsibilities overlapped significantly for eighteenth-century Quaker men and women. By considering the Quaker husband-wife relationship and the Quaker parent-child relationship, one may conclude that Quaker gendered tasks were not rigid. Chapter Three proposes the idea that Quaker mothers sometimes acted like fathers, and Quaker fathers often acted like mothers. The Virginia exiles’ wives fulfilled the duties of Quaker fathers by becoming providers for and protectors of their households and children; furthermore, the exiled Quaker men acted similar to mothers, because they enjoyed affectionate relationships with their children comparable to the Quaker mother-child relationship. The Virginia exile narrative allows us to explore the complexities involved in understanding eighteenth-century Quaker women’s roles in the domestic setting.

This thesis also explores Quaker women’s public activism in their sacred and secular communities. Chapter Four proposes that Quaker women’s identities as wives

and mothers and their political activism were closely linked. The wives of the Virginia exiles became active in secular affairs only when their families and livelihood were threatened. Furthermore, Chapter Four argues the women built upon the foundations of their faith and used the skills they had acquired as leaders in their church community to cross over into secular politics. The exiles' wives petitioned and met with important colonial officials on behalf of their husbands and played an integral role in the men's eventual release. Their actions were not viewed as unfeminine by their peers, because they fit with Quaker women's religious duties as wives and mothers.

This thesis is dedicated to the professors, family members, and friends who have contributed to my success throughout my academic career.

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I also am grateful for the institutions that made the research for this thesis possible, including SHEAR, the McNeil Center for Early American Studies, and Virginia Wesleyan College. Each of these organizations provided the funding and lodging necessary for me to conduct my research in and around the Philadelphia area. Without these trips this thesis would not exist. The opportunities SHEAR provided were invaluable to my growth as an historian, and this program opened many doors I never knew existed.

I also appreciate the contributions of the staff of the Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore College and wish to recognize them for their generous help each time I visited their archive. Since my stays in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania were often limited, it was important that I make the most of every minute in the FHL. The staff helped by recommending sources, pulling materials for me before my arrival, and making copies of important documents that I did not have time to examine in the facilities. I also thank the

Historical Society of Pennsylvania and the American Philosophical Society for their comparable hospitality.

Obviously, I must also thank my family and friends for their solid support throughout this endeavor. My mother has always loved and supported me unconditionally, even when it seemed like I would never finish this project. My father has always pushed me to work harder, even when I felt like I was already at my limits. He has also supported me financially over the last four years and never complained about the massive pile of books and papers that made eating at the dining room table impossible. I also want to thank my grandfather, who fostered my interest in history and is always willing to read my work, no matter how long it takes him to finish. I wish I could name everyone in my family individually, but that would take almost as long as writing the actual thesis. In the interest of saving time and space, I will thank them collectively by stating that I appreciate everything they have done to get me to this point.

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For anyone I may have forgotten: please know that just because I did not include you in this section that does not mean I do not appreciate all you have done to get me to this point.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:
THE CASE OF THE VIRGINIA EXILES AND THEIR FAMILIES

In August 1777 in the city of Philadelphia, the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania, at the direction of the Continental Congress, ordered the arrest of forty-one men suspected of being loyal to the British Empire. On August 25, Major General John Sullivan of the Continental Army wrote to the Continental Congress claiming to have found letters from the Quakers' Spanktown Yearly meeting, which revealed that Quakers in that region had transmitted to the British confidential information about the Continental Army's movements.¹ Sarah Logan Fisher's husband Thomas was one of those suspected. In her diary, she explained that the Continental Congress, after investigating this incident, determined that these letters "show a disposition inimical to the cause of America," but added that "the last paper, number 11, being sent they say by General Sullivan, & taken by him on Staten Island, appears to be a notorious forgery."² Despite the suspicion that at least one of the documents in question was fake, the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania exiled twenty-one Philadelphia men to

This paper follows the format requirements of *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* 6th edition by Kate L. Turabian.

¹Please see James D. Anderson, "Thomas Wharton, Exile in Virginia, 1777-1778," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 89, no. 4 (1981): 425-47, Robert F. Oaks, "Philadelphians in Exile: The Problem of Loyalty During the American Revolution," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 96, no. 3 (1972): 298-325, and Kenneth A. Radbill, "The Ordeal of Elizabeth Drinker," *Pennsylvania History* 46, no. 2 (1980): 147-172. Each of these sources describes the elements of the men's arrests in great detail. All of the background information included in the reconstruction of this story, unless otherwise noted, has been extracted from these sources.

²Sarah Logan Fisher, "September 7, 1777" in "A Diary of Trifling Occurrences": Philadelphia, 1776-1778," ed. Nicholas B. Wainwright, *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 82, no. 4 (1958): 446.

Virginia from September 1777 to April 1778. Twenty of the prisoners were Quakers.³

Between September 2 and September 4, 1777, four officers confronted the forty-one suspected loyalists, gave them the opportunity to sign an oath of loyalty to Pennsylvania, and arrested and confined to the Philadelphia Free Mason's Lodge those who declined.⁴ The Continental Congress and the Pennsylvania Council declared that any prisoners who swore the loyalty oath would be released, but the Quaker prisoners refused because Quaker religious doctrine prohibited them from swearing oaths. Those imprisoned in the Mason's Lodge requested a hearing numerous times, hoping for the "Opportunity...[to lay] our Grievances before your Body" and to exercise "the Liberties and Privileges to which We are entitled by the fundamental Rules of Justice."⁵ After several unsuccessful requests for an inquiry, the detainees proclaimed, "We have never been suffered to come before [the Executive Council of Pennsylvania] to evince our innocence, and remove suspicions which you have laboured [*sic*] to instill into the minds of others, and at the same time knew to be groundless, altho' [*sic*] Congress recommended it to you to give us a hearing."⁶ Apparently the prisoners were dissatisfied

³Anderson, "Thomas Wharton," 432. Many of the original forty-one suspects were released for agreeing to swear an oath that proclaimed their loyalty to Pennsylvania.

⁴Ibid., 431. The oath of loyalty offered to the prisoners read, "I...do swear (or affirm) that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a free and independent state." Quoted in Anderson, "Thomas Wharton, Exile in Virginia, 1777-1778," 431. The Quaker suspects refused to pledge to the loyalty oath because "[t]heir faith and the Scriptures taught them to 'swear not at all.'" Please see Jack D. Marietta, *The Reformation of American Quakerism, 1748-1783* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 3 & 267-69 for more information on Quakers and oaths.

⁵"To the president and Council of Pennsylvania. The remonstrance of the subscribers, freemen, and inhabitants of the city of Philadelphia, now confined in the Free-Mason's Lodge," September 1777 (Philadelphia: Printed by Robert Bell, in Third-Street, 1777), Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans Readex Digital Collections. "Your Body" is a direct reference to the Pennsylvania Council.

⁶"Mason's Lodge, September 9th, 1777...To the inhabitants of Pennsylvania. The following is a copy of a paper we received at half past four o'clock this afternoon, and we have since received orders to prepare for our banishment tomorrow," 9 September 1777 (Philadelphia: Printed by Robert Bell, 1777), Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans Readex Digital Collections.

that they had never been given the chance to formally assert their innocence.

Around the time of this proclamation, the Continental Congress suggested to the Pennsylvania Council that it grant the prisoners' requests for a hearing. The Continental Congress then separated itself from the situation, maintaining that the prisoners were subject to the sole authority of the Supreme Executive Council and that it "would not interfere in the state's internal affairs."⁷ Despite the prisoners' demands and the Continental Congress' recommendation that the prisoners be granted a hearing, the Pennsylvania Council resolved on September 9, 1777 that the prisoners "having refused to promise to refrain from corresponding with the Enemy, and also declined giving any Assurance of Allegiance to this State...do thereby renounce all the Privileges of Citizenship...[and] the Persons whose Names are mentioned above, be, without further Delay, removed to *Staunton, Virginia*."⁸

Elizabeth Drinker, wife of prisoner Henry Drinker, described the exiles' somber departure from Philadelphia two days later, on September 11, 1777. She wrote,

Some time after dinner Harry came in a hurry...informing me that the waggons [*sic*] were waiting at the Lodge to take our dear Friends away. I quickly went there; and as quickly came away finding great a number of People there but few women, bid my dearest Husband farewell, and went in great distress to James Pembertons.⁹

The Pemberton family was very close to Elizabeth Drinker and her family, so it is no surprise that Elizabeth retreated to their home seeking comfort. Furthermore, the

⁷Elaine Forman Crane, ed., *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker: The Life Cycle of an Eighteenth-Century Woman* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994), 61.

⁸"Mason's Lodge, September 9th, 1777...To the inhabitants of Pennsylvania," *Early American Imprints*. The exiles eventually ended up residing in Winchester, Virginia for most of the exile period.

⁹Elizabeth Drinker, "September 11, 1777" in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker: The Life Cycle of an Eighteenth-Century Woman*, ed. Elaine Forman Crane (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994), 61.

Pembertons knew the anguish Drinker experienced, as three of their own were amongst those banished to Virginia.¹⁰ Brothers Israel, James, and John Pemberton joined Henry Drinker in the prisoners' wagons, all uncertain about what awaited them in Staunton.

Whatever their fate, John Pemberton wrote, "The Friends sent into exile were among the most eminent for influence and usefulness" in their community.¹¹ In fact, the evidence suggests many of the Quaker exiles and their connections lived comfortably as part of the city's upper-class. Sarah Logan Fisher's family was wealthy enough to employ multiple house servants¹², and Elizabeth Drinker managed to keep "her household staffed with both permanent and hired day servants" for most of her adult life.¹³ This left both women free to engage in the activities of other "well-to-do" urban women of their day, which included such leisure activities as reading, dancing, and socializing.¹⁴ In their diaries, Fisher and Drinker made note of their participation in such amusements and often described "supping" or "taking tea" with their beloved families and extended connections.¹⁵ The women's social and economic status allowed them to live more comfortably than most, but this does not mean the exiles' wives lived lives of

¹⁰For a complete list of the Virginia Exiles, please see John Pemberton's description in *The Diary of John Pemberton: for the years 1777-1778*, ed. Eli K. Price, Edited from the mss. in the possession of the Society. A paper read before "The Numismatic and Antiquarian Society of Philadelphia," Thursday evening, July 5, 1866 (Philadelphia: Henry B. Ashmead, 1867), 10.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 23.

¹³Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), 253.

¹⁴Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 23.

¹⁵For instance, see Fisher, "December 21, 1777" in "'A Diary of Trifling Occurrences'," 417. Here Fisher described a pleasant evening she spent visiting her "Mammy," after which she called on Phebe Pemberton, wife of exile James Pemberton, and the two women socialized and "drank tea."

leisure. As Linda Kerber points out, “Even upper- and middle-class [urban] women...spent immense amounts of time at work” and the exiles’ wives “still produced many of the household necessities” alongside their servants.¹⁶ The women’s prominent social position and their experience in the maintenance and management of their households proved to be invaluable to their families’ survival during their husbands’ exile in Virginia. Not only did they use their leadership skills as Quaker women and their knowledge of household management when charged with supporting their families, but they benefited from their social status to organize meetings with governing colonial officials and became political activists on behalf of their husbands.¹⁷

It is not clear why the Continental Congress and the Supreme Executive Council agreed to the arrest and exile of the Philadelphia Quaker men, but a closer look at the men’s lives before their banishment suggests why they may have been targeted and labeled dissenters. A brief analysis of Thomas Fisher’s, Henry Drinker’s, and James Pemberton’s daily activities immediately before the confinement indicates that this group of men was targeted for several reasons. Their belief in the Quaker principles of non-violence and neutrality, their occupations and the obligations required of such positions, and their criticisms of the decision of the Continental Congress to sever political and economic ties with Great Britain likely led their contemporaries to view them with suspicion.

¹⁶Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 252-3.

¹⁷See Chapter Four, which describes the exiles’ wives increased political activism during this period. They petitioned and met with General George Washington and several Supreme Executive Council Members on behalf of their husbands, attempting to secure a release order for the exiles. While the women were unsuccessful in some of these exchanges, they would not take no for an answer and persisted in their attempts until they achieved the results they desired. Their class and social standing certainly explain why the officials were willing to entertain the wives and elucidate why the women were able to be so relentless in their demands.

Thomas Fisher, one of the exiled men and a main character of this thesis, was a partner in his father's merchant firm, Joshua Fisher & Son's. The Fishers were well-known in Philadelphia "as one of the community's outstanding families before the outbreak of the revolution."¹⁸ While Fisher's prominence in his community was not by itself sufficient to instigate his arrest, his political beliefs and obligations as a merchant did put him and his family at risk. Although Thomas and his wife Sarah Logan Fisher tried to follow the Quaker emphasis on pacifism and neutrality by remaining neutral in the revolution, Thomas' mercantile interests made it difficult for him to cut all ties with England even as many of his contemporaries rallied in favor of independence.¹⁹ Fisher's business ties to Great Britain, coupled with his commitment to Quaker principles,²⁰ were suspicious to Philadelphia's patriots. Thus the Fishers "suffered severely during the war,"²¹ and when the incriminating letters surfaced and implicated local Quakers for sabotaging the Continental war effort, Thomas was vulnerable.

Like Fisher, Henry Drinker, another of the Virginia exiles, was a "prominent and prosperous...shipping merchant," though he also engaged in iron manufacturing and land

¹⁸Nicholas B. Wainwright, "'A Diary of Trifling Occurrences': Philadelphia, 1776-1778," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 82, no. 4 (1958): 411.

¹⁹Ibid. Fisher and his wife Sarah did adopt a neutral stance in the wake of the revolution. Wainwright explains they would not use Continental currency, they refused to pay mandatory and voluntary war taxes, and they would not swear allegiance to Pennsylvania, even when Thomas faced possible banishment for refusing to do so.

²⁰Margaret Hope Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism: The Story of Quaker Women in America* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1986), 73. Bacon describes that during the American Revolution, Quakers believed they should remain neutral in "all armed conflict" and "be loyal to established government, so long as that government did not impose on their consciences." Because of this, Quakers during the American Revolution risked being viewed as loyalists rather than pacifists.

²¹Wainwright, "'A Diary of Trifling Occurrences'," 412. Because the Fisher's were pacifists and simultaneously appeared to be "conscientious royalists," their family warehouse in Philadelphia was frequently vandalized and robbed by Continental troops.

investment.²² Also like Fisher and his family, Drinker and his connections were outspoken pacifists with some loyalist tendencies whose business required strong ties with Great Britain's trading market. Drinker tried to honor the Quaker tenets that dictated non-violence and neutrality, but this became much more difficult once local patriots started to pressure Quaker merchants to respect colonial non-importation legislation. Henry Drinker's opposition to the agreements was apparent as early as 1774, when the First Continental Congress "requested merchants to refrain from ordering any further English goods" while it debated the course of action "to be taken for the preservation of the liberties of America."²³ Drinker and other Quaker merchants in Philadelphia reluctantly agreed to abide by the non-importation arrangement, because they realized their refusal to do so would be met with ridicule by the city's fervent patriots. At the same time, Drinker and other Quaker merchants denounced the policy and predicted it would bring "distress and ruin" to their city.²⁴

James Pemberton, another Virginia exile and an important character of this thesis, was also a leading Quaker merchant, and like Drinker was apprehensive of Congress' emphasis on non-importation. Not only was Pemberton critical of the revolutionaries, he also disapproved of his Quaker contemporaries who had "not kept within such limits and bounds as we could wish."²⁵ Pemberton was referring to Friends who collaborated with the Continental Congress in advocating non-importation, which he viewed as a contradiction to the Quaker belief in neutrality. Pemberton's and Drinker's criticisms of

²²Radbill, "The Ordeal of Elizabeth Drinker," 147.

²³Quoted in Robert F. Oaks, "Philadelphia Merchants and the First Continental Congress," *Pennsylvania History* 40, no. 2 (1973): 150.

²⁴Ibid., 151.

²⁵Ibid., 156.

the Congress did not go unnoticed by revolutionary authorities, who were in no mood to tolerate the foot-dragging inaction and opposition of the Quaker pacifists. The Quaker men did little to hide their disapproval of Congress' activities, and such sentiments may have contributed to their arrest less than three years later.

Although the Quaker men appeared to be sympathetic to Great Britain, there is little evidence to determine if they were indeed loyalists or simply pacifists unfortunate enough to reside in one of the most radical of American cities during the revolution. However, less than three weeks after the suspected Quaker loyalists were banished to Virginia, the British army attacked and occupied Philadelphia.²⁶ One may speculate that the Continental Congress and the Supreme Executive Council may have anticipated an impending British assault and sought to rid the city of internal enemies who might report on Continental troop movements. Although there are many uncertainties surrounding the Philadelphia Quaker men's arrest and confinement, we can infer that the men were arrested and exiled for a combination of reasons. The Quaker emphasis on pacifism and neutrality, the men's ostensible loyalist leanings, and their repeated criticisms of the city's patriot activities all contributed to their arrest and banishment.

The ways in which the Virginia exiles' story unfolded over the next seven months serves as a captivating narrative, but it also reveals much about eighteenth-century Quaker women's political activities and the Quaker understanding of women's roles. From September 1777 to April 1778, while the Quaker prisoners were imprisoned in Virginia, the men's wives, mothers, and sisters found it necessary to become what many

²⁶Drinker, "September 26, 1777" in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Crane (1994), 63-4.

historians have labeled surrogate or deputy husbands.²⁷ This responsibility required that the women assume the duties that traditionally were tended to by husbands, brothers, or sons. Not only did the women find it necessary to take on these masculine responsibilities, including protecting their homes and children from rowdy armies, demanding compensation for belongings taken from their homes, and actively petitioning governing bodies, but they were also expected to fulfill the duties appropriate to Quaker women. This thesis will discuss the dual responsibilities the women confronted while their men were in exile to illustrate the fluidity of eighteenth-century Quaker gendered roles.

This thesis focuses on the actions and writings of the exiles' wives and female relatives during an era of revolutionary change. In particular, it considers the women's willingness to take over the men's responsibilities, the petitions and letters they presented to colonial officials, and the series of meetings they organized with the same officials to demand their husbands' release. The Quaker women's diaries, correspondence, and the petition make it possible to reconstruct their personal and public responses to the exile; furthermore, these documents also reveal that their responses were shaped by their desire to protect and preserve their families while adhering to their faith. A closer look at these sources reveals much about eighteenth-century Quaker women's responsibilities as wives and mothers and how such duties affected their political activism.

²⁷Historians, including Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and Joan R. Gundersen, have explored the notion of surrogate or deputy husbands during this period in great detail. Please see Chapter Three of this thesis for a thorough analysis of this idea. Also, see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980) and Joan R. Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World: Women in Revolutionary America* (New York: Twayne, 1996) for more information on this subject.

The purity and preservation of the family was a central concern to eighteenth-century Quakers, and this notion was a driving factor for the women's decisions. This project will illustrate that although the women adopted the role of surrogate husband, they did so in ways that conformed to eighteenth-century English and Quaker notions of gender. The women temporarily fulfilled the duties of their husbands, particularly the duties of protectors and providers for their families, but intended to revert to their normal lives when their husbands returned. They did not consider their wartime roles to be revolutionary or in defiance of gender norms but rather the duty of a Quaker woman.

The historiography of eighteenth-century American women's history demonstrates that the way the exiles' wives responded to their situation was not unique, although historians have yet to fully explore the connections between Quaker women's religious beliefs and their wartime experiences.²⁸ This thesis seeks to fill that void. The writings and actions of the Quaker women whose husbands were exiled to Virginia suggest that their responses were influenced by two important factors: their devotion to their religion and to their families.²⁹ This thesis will show that the actions of this group of women were shaped by their desire to be faithful Quakers, good wives, and good mothers. Finally, this project aims to broaden our understanding of women's roles in late eighteenth-century America and their contributions to the American Revolution,

²⁸For analysis of the historiography relevant to this topic, see Chapter Two of this thesis.

²⁹This project will draw most of its primary evidence from the Fishers', the Drinkers', and the Pembertons' private collections, because materials in these collections dated from September 1777 and April 1778 are devoted to the story of the men in exile. Sarah Logan Fisher's and Elizabeth Drinker's diaries have been especially useful in my attempts to understand the deeper implications of this incident. In addition to these diaries, this thesis will use other evidence, including petitions, official documents, and letters between exiles and their families, to supplement the diaries. The families' experiences can be considered representative of the entire group of the exiles and their families. Because they came from Quaker backgrounds, they were of the same socioeconomic status, their husbands had similar occupations prior to their arrests, and many of the families responded together and in similar ways to these men's arrests.

particularly the contributions of Quaker women.

In order to argue for the fluidity of Quaker gender boundaries, it is important to examine Quaker family relationships and Quaker women's presence in the private and public realms.³⁰ Chapter Three explores the notion that Quaker men's and women's duties to their families were flexible and often overlapped. Quaker women's and men's responsibilities as husbands, wives, mothers, or fathers were not fixed, as mothers often fulfilled the duties of fathers and vice versa. Chapter Four argues that Quaker women's influence was not confined to the private, or domestic, realm. Rather, Quaker women were a significant presence in their church, where they were often powerful and respected spiritual leaders. Furthermore, the story of the wives of the Quaker exiles illustrates how Quaker women navigated the secular world of politics. Their story allows historians to explore the complexities of Quaker women's identities as wives and mothers, and in so doing re-evaluate eighteenth-century Quaker women's roles in their sacred and secular communities.

³⁰The definitions of public and private realms will be described in Chapter Two of this thesis.

CHAPTER II

HISTORIOGRAPHY

This thesis is influenced by historiographical studies of U.S. women's history, the American Revolution, and Quaker history, as well as studies focusing on the uniqueness of Quaker women's experiences in colonial America. Recent eighteenth-century gender studies emphasize the complexities involved in understanding gender relations during this period. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Americans were in the process of redefining gender roles and relationships. In the early part of the eighteenth-century, American women were generally expected to devote their lives to domesticity and motherhood. Domestic tasks included caring for their children, cooking, cleaning, and making clothes.¹ During the American Revolution women's list of duties expanded dramatically because of the nature of the conflict. Women became political activists, participated in boycotts, and provided for their families while their husbands were at war. By the end of the revolution, women had proven they were capable of much more than domesticity and child-rearing; thus, citizens of the new nation realized it was time to reconsider what the proper role of women should be.

While many areas of historical study are complex, historians seem to agree that characterizing late-eighteenth-century gender relations and men's and women's roles is complicated. From the late eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century, Americans experienced a period of far-reaching change that raised fundamental questions about appropriate gender behaviors. Joan R. Gundersen argues eighteenth-century men and

¹Linda Grant DePauw, *Founding Mothers: Women in America in the Revolutionary Era* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1975), 3. DePauw describes these tasks as mothers' responsibilities in eighteenth-century America.

women constructed new social patterns “in an era of contested gender roles.”² She finds evidence of such changes in “law, household duties...and social customs,” all of which “challenged and constructed Americans’ understanding of gender.”³ Linda Kerber articulates similar sentiments and argues this period involved “a reconstruction of the relationships between men and women... [and] a new coding of what it was to be masculine and what it was to be feminine.”⁴ The revolutionary period presented an ideal environment for the redefinition of gender roles, because the war required women and men to participate in activities that were new to them.

It is important to note that eighteenth-century women were not passive observers of the revolution. Carol Berkin explains many women participated in boycotts and protests, organized relief efforts for needy soldiers and fatherless families, and occasionally took up arms in support of the American cause.⁵ She indicates such activities advanced many women outside of their traditional, prescribed roles, legitimizing “new ideas about women’s capacities and their proper roles” in post war society.⁶ The ideas articulated in Berkin’s *Revolutionary Mothers* fit with most interpretations about the changes the war initiated in women’s lives. Her study is impressive and considers the experiences of a range of women, including Indian and

²Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World*, 142.

³Ibid., 142-3.

⁴Linda Kerber et al., “Beyond Roles, Beyond Spheres: Thinking about Gender in the Early Republic,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (1989): 585.

⁵Carol Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggle for America’s Independence* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), xv-xvi.

⁶Ibid., xvi-xvii.

slave women, but not religious women. This thesis builds upon her interpretation and the argument of other studies, which do not discuss the affect of the war on Quaker women.

Historians have attempted to describe how American society defined women's role in the new nation, and Linda Kerber was the first to characterize women's responsibilities in the Early Republic as "Republican Motherhood." According to Kerber, the post-revolutionary generation encouraged women to integrate "political values into [their] domestic life," and charged mothers with instilling civic virtue in their sons and daughters. As Republican mothers, women were responsible for ensuring the success of the new nation by raising their children to be virtuous, upstanding citizens of the new republic.⁷ The creation of such a role served a dual purpose, Kerber argues. It justified women's political behavior during and after the Revolution and ensured women played a significant political role from the confines of their homes.⁸ Kerber views this role as a passive form of exclusion, because it kept women "on the periphery of the political community."⁹ Whether or not this was the case, this duty nevertheless gave women more political power than previous generations.

Berkin's *First Generations* offers a similar argument about women's perceived moral obligations in the new American Republic. She points out that upon considering "the question of women's place in the new republic," many agreed that women had proven they "were capable of reasoned moral behavior...of political commitment, [and]

⁷Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 11.

⁸Ibid., 12.

⁹Ibid.

of patriotic action.”¹⁰ Berkin asserts that as the nation struggled to find an appropriate civic role for women who had shown they were capable of more than domestic motherhood, the citizens of the Early Republic resolved this dilemma by assigning women “the role of guardians and instructors in virtue.”¹¹

This thesis proposes that ideas similar to Kerber’s republican motherhood existed in the Quaker community decades before the Revolution. In fact, during the mid-eighteenth-century, when American Quakers initiated a series of social and political reforms they believed would strengthen the sect, Quaker parents were urged to instill Quaker virtue in their children.¹² Similar to Republican mothers, who believed the success of the new nation rested on their ability to raise upstanding citizens, Quakers believed “the future of the Church depended upon cultivating the...young” to be good Quakers.¹³ Chapter Three of this thesis shows that the exiles and their wives were very involved in their children’s religious instruction and worried when their children strayed from the church, suggesting an altered form of Kerber’s Republican Motherhood emerged in the Quaker community as early as the mid-eighteenth century.

Mary Beth Norton disagrees that the Revolution altered the “constraints of femininity” and instead argues American postwar society began to recognize “the social significance” of women’s traditional responsibilities.¹⁴ Instead of searching for postwar changes to women’s lives “in the public world of law and politics,” Norton notes striking

¹⁰Carol Berkin, *First Generations: Women in Colonial America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 196-8.

¹¹Ibid., 200.

¹²Marietta, *The Reformation of American Quakerism*, 58-9.

¹³Ibid., 59.

¹⁴Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 296-8.

changes “in women’s private lives—in familial organization, personal aspirations, [and] self-assessments.”¹⁵ Norton recognizes one does not need to discover changes to the legal system to argue for significant developments in the ways men and women of the Early Republic defined femininity and womanhood.

Norton shows that women of the Early Republic increasingly participated in “extradomestic activities,” but they “managed to conceal their flouting of convention by subsuming their actions within the confines of an orthodox...conception of womanhood and its proper functions.”¹⁶ Overall, Norton argues that women did not experience significant legal or economic change as a result of the Revolution, but that their contributions to the war allowed them to use their domestic and maternal skills outside of the home after the conflict. Chapter Four of this thesis indicates that the exiles’ wives also participated in “extradomestic activities,” particularly as political activists on behalf of their husbands and that they were not criticized because the activities fit with their religious role. Chapter Four shows that Quaker women were encouraged to be spiritual leaders in their church, and the exiles’ wives used these experiences to petition and meet with governing officials.

While some historians agree that the war initiated some type of change in the status of women in the Early Republic, others are unconvinced that the Revolution initiated any changes in women’s legal, political, and social status. In an article that considers the legal status of women in the new Republic, Marylynn Salmon considers

¹⁵Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, xix.

¹⁶Ibid., 298. Gundersen agrees with Kerber and Norton’s notion of republican motherhood, adding, “Middle- and upper-class white women created republican motherhood as a means of participating in nation-building.” Gundersen’s analysis is useful because she acknowledges the exclusion of poor, minority women in this process. Please see Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World*, 148.

marriage, divorce, and dower laws, the three components of the legal system most relevant to women of this era. She concludes, “No radical changes alleviated the basic position of dependency occupied by married women.”¹⁷ Though she admits the law was not static during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, Salmon argues that legal changes affecting the status of women were “gradual...[and] conservative.”¹⁸

Salmon’s analysis of women’s legal status after the Revolution is impressive, but careful consideration of women in the postwar period suggests women’s lives changed in other ways. Just because the law did not redefine a woman’s status in the immediate postwar period does not mean men and women did not change how they viewed themselves and one another. Indeed, historical studies indicate that late eighteenth-century Americans were redefining appropriate gender roles and boundaries. While studying the legal codes sheds some light on gender roles, it can take decades for legal codes to reflect how people defined their social responsibilities. Although post-revolutionary laws did not reflect immediate change, this does not mean people had not changed the way they lived.

¹⁷Marylynn Salmon, “‘Life, Liberty, and Dower’: The Legal Status of Women After the American Revolution” in *Women, War, and Revolution*, ed. Carol R. Berkin and Clara M. Lovett (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980), 85. Joan Hoff Wilson also argues that the war did not improve women’s status. See Joan Hoff Wilson, “The Illusion of Change: Women and the American Revolution” in *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism*, ed. Alfred F. Young (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976), 387. Wilson expresses similar skepticism in her essay “The Negative Impact of the American Revolution on Women” in *Major Problems in American Women’s History*, ed. Mary Beth Norton and Ruth M. Alexander (Lexington, Massachusetts: D.C. Heath, 1996), 83-103. In that essay she insists traditional patriarchal relationships were only temporarily disrupted during the Revolution but were quickly reestablished in the early years of the new Republic. Historians, such as Linda Kerber, have overturned such doubts and are confident “the female experience” during the Revolution was not “marginal or trivial.” See Linda Kerber, “‘History Can Do It No Justice’: Women and the Reinterpretation of the American Revolution” in *Toward an Intellectual History of Women: Essays by Linda Kerber*, ed. Linda Kerber (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 69.

¹⁸Salmon, “‘Life, Liberty, and Dower,’” 85.

Another trend in eighteenth-century women's historiography is the study of private and public realms or spheres, which have been defined as metaphoric spaces that were gender-segregated.¹⁹ Linda Kerber examines the notion of separate spheres and the ways in which this idea has been used to characterize eighteenth-century gender relations by tracing the eighteenth-century origins of a metaphor more commonly associated with nineteenth-century America. She finds that the tendency to describe gender relations in such terms was continued by twentieth-century historians in search of ways to organize the stories they were telling.²⁰ This project proposes that using such terms can be useful when distinguishing among Quaker women's domestic responsibilities, their activities in their public church community, and their behaviors in secular society. These were three separate "spaces" and Quaker women's roles differed in each.

Susan Branson agrees with Kerber's analysis of private and public spheres and though she believes such a framework can be useful, she argues such rhetoric never "confined women to domestic duties and private identities."²¹ Overall, Branson's work scrutinizes "women's changing public roles as they resulted from the social, cultural, and political forces at work in American society in the last two decades of the eighteenth century."²² Instead of focusing on the Revolution as the primary force behind gender role changes, Branson considers the broader social and political developments that also led

¹⁹It is important to point out that the terms 'spheres' and 'realms' are often used interchangeably.

²⁰Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Separate Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," in *Toward an Intellectual History of Women*, 161.

²¹Susan Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 2.

²²*Ibid.*

Americans to redefine a woman's role in the early Republic.²³ She argues that increased "availability of printed materials and increased readership, the revitalization of cultural institutions such as theater and salons, and the development of a national political culture that simultaneously involved into a [competitive] party system" initiated many discussions about women's involvement in the political culture of their day.²⁴ Her analysis of eighteenth-century political culture is refreshing, and it demonstrates the complexities involved in understanding the changes in women's lives in the post-revolutionary era. Finally, it illustrates that "a lack of change in women's legal or economic status" does not mean that women's lives were unchanged "by the political and cultural developments" of this period.²⁵

To further complicate our understanding of women's status in eighteenth-century America, historians are beginning to focus on aspects of women's lives that affected their social and political experiences, such as race, economic or social status, religious ties, physical location, or marital status.²⁶ Karin Wulf illustrates the differences between married women and single women in colonial Philadelphia and finds that unmarried women "comprised a statistically and culturally significant population in colonial Philadelphia."²⁷ Furthermore, she outlines the experiences of each in the private and public spheres. She describes *femes soles*, women who were not wives, "possessed the

²³Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames*, 3.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid., 144.

²⁶These categories or factors could change the definition of masculinity and femininity and alter men's and women's relationships to one another. See Kerber et al., "Beyond Roles, Beyond Spheres," 582-5. This thesis is interested in how a woman's religious ties may have changed her experiences during this period.

²⁷Karin Wulf, *Not All Wives: Women of Colonial Philadelphia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 2.

same legal capacity as any man,” while *femes covertes*, married women, were limited in their legal and economic endeavors. *Femes covertes* did not have many legal or political rights separate from their husbands’. Instead of assuming that all women of colonial Philadelphia had no political or legal rights because of their gender, Wulf illustrates *femes soles* had more complex “cultural relationships...to their families, communities, and politics” than previously imagined.²⁸ By separating married and unmarried women, Wulf is able to illustrate a profound “public presence of unmarried women” during this period.²⁹

By viewing women’s history from the perspective of their marital status, Wulf distinguishes her study from those that attempt to “normalize” women’s history by linking women solely based on their gender. Those who attempt to define the experiences of women as a whole tend to neglect other factors that made eighteenth-century women’s experiences unique. This thesis extends Wulf’s argument by analyzing the ways in which a woman’s religious ties defined her status as a woman and altered her political responsibilities.

²⁸Wulf, *Not All Wives*, 3. Wulf is not the first to recognize the complexity of the female social structure of Philadelphia. For instance, in 1983 Carole Shammass explored the female social structure of late-eighteenth-century Philadelphia and concluded women fulfilled a range of social positions beyond that of a wife. However, Shammass’ analysis of the social structure only considered women as wives, boarders, hired servants, bound servants, slaves, and children (71). She offers little analysis of unmarried women and suggests that though many women were heads of households at some time in their lives (whether widowed or young and not yet married), most women married and lost their economic and legal authority to their husbands. See Carole Shammass, “The Female Social Structure of Philadelphia in 1775,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 107 (1983): 69-83. Wulf’s study considers many questions older works do not explore, and she shows unmarried women enjoyed considerable agency during this period.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 4-5. Wulf also points out the trend of unmarried women playing an active role in the public sphere may be unique to Philadelphia. She explains the city’s early culture was influenced by “the presence of religious groups such as Quakers and Moravians who held alternative views of gender and marriage.” Such beliefs allowed “for the development of positive models of femininity outside marriage.” Please see Wulf, 2 for more information.

An impressive body of literature sheds light on Quaker experiences in early America. In studies that focus on Quaker women's lives, historians generally argue that they were different from other women of this period because the Society of Friends was "the first sect to embody a concept of spiritual equality of men and women."³⁰ Historians have shown that this concept was not limited to women's participation in the church, and that Quaker women had access to equal educational opportunities, were considered equal partners in marriage, participated in their husbands' business affairs, and shared domestic responsibilities with their husbands.

Rebecca Larson's *Daughters of Light* compares the differences between eighteenth-century Quaker notions of gender and that of secular society. She concludes that Quaker beliefs sanctioned women's powerful presence as leaders in their churches, and that such ideas contradicted secular society's beliefs about the proper roles of women. She contends the "conflict between Quaker values and those of the 'world's' culture became insurmountable with the onset of the Revolutionary War."³¹ Here she refers to a range of conflicting values, which included ideas of women's proper place within their communities.

To suggest that the conflicting values between Quaker and secular societies became insurmountable indicates that these cultures had very different views of women's nature. For example, the Society of Friends accepted women as preachers and traveling ministers, and their ability to be influential in such venues "was a great liberation for

³⁰Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism*, 2.

³¹Rebecca Larson, *Daughters of Light: Quaker Women Preaching and Prophesying in the Colonies and Abroad, 1700-1775* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 220.

many [Quaker] women.”³² However, those outside of the Quaker community looked at “women preachers... as objects of curiosity, sometimes of ridicule.”³³ Eighteenth-century civil and Quaker societies clearly had conflicting ideas on the roles of women in public settings. This conflict becomes even more evident if we consider the case of the exiles’ wives. The Quaker wives were leading members of their church community, and their diaries and letters indicate that they were diligent attendants of the Quaker meetings. There is no indication that their Quaker contemporaries, men or women, criticized their active presence in their church or their transition to involvement in secular affairs. When the Quaker women used the skills they had acquired as leaders in their church to meet with and petition George Washington and the Supreme Executive Council, Elizabeth Drinker’s diary indicates they were not taken seriously by many officials, which in turn suggests that though the Quaker community supported the women in their endeavors, secular officials believed politics was men’s business.

Larson points out another significant difference between Quaker and secular society: the blurring of gendered boundaries came much earlier for the Quaker community. In fact, when Quaker men withdrew from secular politics after the onset of the mid-eighteenth-century Quaker Reformation, Larson argues, they were rejecting “an area of activity from which women had been formally excluded.”³⁴ This move allowed

³²Jean E. Mortimer, “Quaker Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constraints and Opportunities,” *The Journal of the Friends’ Historical Society* 57, no. 3 (1996): 234.

³³Ibid. Mortimer points out that mid-eighteenth century-Quaker women conducted themselves as respectable, peaceable citizens when they stepped into the “civil sphere” to limit the risk of religious persecution.

³⁴Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 220. Marietta’s *The Reformation of American Quakerism* characterizes the reformation as a time when conservative Quakers initiated various social and political reforms. The ultimate goal was to reform dissenting Quakers who had strayed away from many basic tenets of the faith, including the notion of “[e]qual treatment [that] flowed naturally from Quaker

Quaker men to focus “on the concerns they had always shared with Quaker women: morality, the education of the young, and philanthropy,”³⁵ thus reaffirming the Quaker notion of equality of the sexes at a crucial moment in American history.

Finally, Larson emphasizes that Quaker women had more choices than other women in terms of what they wanted to accomplish in their lives. Karin Wulf has shown this was a time when more women were deciding not to marry, but acknowledges that Philadelphia society was not devoid of the social stigma that came with being unmarried. Some unmarried women were labeled spinsters, but Wulf indicates the large Quaker presence in the city contributed to changing attitudes toward the status of unmarried women generally.³⁶ Larson’s work reveals that Quaker women were not under immense pressure to become wives and mothers; in fact, it was socially acceptable within the Quaker community for women to devote their lives to the public ministry. The fact that Quaker women could have a “‘calling’ beyond marriage or motherhood” was a direct challenge to “the legal subordination of women to men” during the colonial period.³⁷ The story of the exiles’ wives is noteworthy, because it shows that it was possible for Quaker women to simultaneously devote their lives to their religion *and* their families. Chapter Three considers how some Quaker women balanced their responsibilities to their

theology.” See Marietta, *The Reformation*, 27-9 for more information. During the Reformation, Marietta argues Quakers withdrew from most avenues of secular society and focused solely on reforming their community, but the exiles’ narrative indicates there was still considerable involvement in secular society.

³⁵Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 220.

³⁶Wulf, *Not All Wives*, 12. Wulf illustrates that by the nineteenth century it had become acceptable for women to “embrace spinsterhood.” Please see Wulf, 15-8 for more information on changing American attitudes towards single women in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries.

³⁷Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 155. Quaker women did not have to choose between being wives and mothers or public ministers. As Larson points out, “A spiritually ‘gifted’ woman in the Society of Friends could pursue her ministerial ‘calling’ without renouncing marriage or motherhood.” Put another way, Quaker women could be wives, mothers, and public ministers simultaneously. See Larson, 134 for more information.

church with those to their husbands and children. Quaker women did not have to choose between being a spiritual leader or a wife and mother, which implies considerable fluidity between Quaker gender boundaries.

Another historical trend characterizes Quaker women as proto-feminists. But historians must be careful to present a balanced picture of women's duties in the sect, because Quaker women could be both powerful spiritual leaders and traditional good wives and good mothers. Some studies have overemphasized Quaker gender equality and downplayed the fact that many Quaker women identified themselves primarily as wives and mothers. Margaret Hope Bacon's *Mothers of Feminism* argues Quaker women were instrumental "in the development of feminism in this country,"³⁸ and like Larson recognizes that Quaker notions of gender, particularly "the concept of the equality of women and men," were a direct contradiction to the beliefs of their non-Quaker contemporaries.³⁹ Similarly, Bacon focuses on colonial traveling women ministers, spousal equality, and equal educational opportunities for boys and girls.

Bacon's work stresses that Quaker women were the pioneers of the nineteenth-century American women's rights movements and focuses little on the domestic roles Quaker women experienced as wives and mothers. Even Bacon's commentary on Quaker mothers focuses on the fact that Quaker women preferred to nurse their children in lieu of hiring a wet-nurse, and she concludes this section by revealing that by 1786, 23.5 percent of Quaker women who lived to be fifty had never married.⁴⁰ We cannot fully understand Quaker women's range of roles in the sect without examining Quaker

³⁸Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism*, 2.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 57-9.

women as wives and mothers, which is excluded by studies that emphasize the significant percentage of unmarried Quaker women during this period. A major part of a Quaker woman's identity, if married, was influenced by her role as a wife and mother. Chapters Three and Four suggest that eighteenth-century Quaker gender roles were flexible, and it was this flexibility that made it possible for the exiles' wives to carry on in their husbands' absence. Furthermore, it gave them the skills necessary to approach and petition secular governing officials on the men's behalf.

Also influenced by the trend of focusing on the Quaker belief in spiritual equality, Jean E. Mortimer's "Quaker Women in the Eighteenth-Century: Opportunities and Constraints," emphasizes the uniqueness of the Quakers' parallel men's and women's meetings. She describes how Quaker men and women experienced equal spiritual and educational opportunities, and she acknowledges "Quaker women were able to demonstrate to Friends and to the world at large, that authority and leadership...were not solely the prerogative of men."⁴¹ But she is cautious to note "there was still a long way to go in the matter of equality in some spheres."⁴² Mortimer recognizes that Quaker women did experience economic and occupational inequalities, but overall finds that eighteenth-century Quaker women "had a variety of opportunities" non-Quaker women did not.⁴³ This article is an ideal example of how to approach eighteenth-century Quaker women's history. However, Mortimer's study does not include a discussion of Quaker women as wives and mothers, which this thesis proposes is important to understanding the complexities involved in being a Quaker woman.

⁴¹Mortimer, "Quaker Women in the Eighteenth-Century," 253.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., 228.

Quaker historians emphasize that Quaker gender roles were not rigid, because of the Quaker expectation that men and women would play an active role in church leadership. Because of this expectation, Quaker women were not limited to a life of domesticity. Margaret Morris Haviland acknowledges that women's primary role in their households was fluid and that Quaker women became spiritual leaders when they believed God called them.⁴⁴ She also indicates their responsibilities as Quaker women provided them with the skills necessary to transcend gender boundaries. Specifically, she argues eighteenth-century Philadelphian Quaker women relied upon "the Quaker tradition of female activism in the meeting" to step through the 'veil of charity' and into their community as activists.⁴⁵ Haviland admits such activities "did not challenge traditional definitions of women's sphere" because the charity work combined their leadership and activism skills with their domestic abilities.⁴⁶

Historians are quick to note that eighteenth-century women could be an active presence in public, and like Haviland, argue that this presence was limited to those activities that were seen as an extension of their identities as mothers and Christians.⁴⁷ There is considerable work yet to be done to understand Quaker women's involvement in the secular community, particularly politics. This thesis is a step in that direction, because it evaluates the exiles' wives political activities in response to their husbands' arrests. In addition, this study indicates that it is reasonable to conclude that Quaker women's activism during this period was an extension of their responsibilities as mothers

⁴⁴Margaret Morris Haviland, "Beyond Women's Sphere: Young Quaker Women and the Veil of Charity in Philadelphia, 1790-1810," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 51 (1994): 422.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 445.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷For instance, see Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World*, 146-9.

and Christians. Chapter Four illustrates that Quaker women understood their political activism to be an extension of their familial obligations, particularly when their husbands and children were in danger.

Another area of historical interest is the Quaker family, particularly marriage practices and parent-child relationships. J. William Frost's *The Quaker Family in Colonial America* was the first major work to focus on these topics. Frost's work combines church history and social history, and his book examines basic tenets of the faith, "the process of growing up" in the Society of Friends, and the Quaker "style of living."⁴⁸ He concludes that in eighteenth-century America, the institution of family was essential to the survival of the sect because Friends converted few outsiders during this period.⁴⁹ Frost is considered to be a pioneer in the study of American Quaker families and his attempts to understand the complex relationships between husband and wife, parent and child are impressive. He also demonstrates that the expectations of Quaker mothers and fathers were not rigidly defined. For example, instead of labeling a duty as the mother's or father's responsibility, he refers to it as "parental."⁵⁰ This confirms a Quaker mother's and a father's roles overlapped, which is central to the argument of this thesis.

Another historian concerned with Quaker families, Barry Levy, presents an updated version of Frost's study in *Quakers and the American Family*. This work explores how seventeenth and eighteenth-century Delaware Valley Quakers influenced

⁴⁸J. William Frost, *The Quaker Family in Colonial America: A Portrait of the Society of Friends* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1973), 7.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁰For instance, see Frost, *The Quaker Family in Colonial America*, 74-81.

the development of modern American family values, specifically considering how the American family is modeled upon Quaker domesticity.⁵¹ This is an impressive social history that analyzes an array of Quaker relationships, including the complexities of being a Quaker woman. In his chapter “Wives—Ministers—Mothers,” he contends the “Quakers melded women’s sexuality, spirituality, and maternal authority into a novel feminine mystique.”⁵² Levy’s analysis of women as wives, ministers, and mothers is convincing, and his sources include letters, men’s observations of women, meeting records, and court documents. Ultimately Levy finds none of these roles was viewed as more important or more feminine than the others, and concludes that Quaker women truly lived in a world of multiple and conflicting identities. Similarly, this thesis argues that Quaker women had an array of duties as Quaker women and successfully juggled many different roles.

Finally, any analysis of Quakers in eighteenth-century America must address their political involvement to be complete. Quaker women have been excluded from older, foundational political studies, and it is time to reconsider their role, especially in secular politics. The most influential studies of Pennsylvania Quakers emphasize that Quaker men dominated colonial Pennsylvania politics until the mid-eighteenth-century, when the Quaker community officially withdrew from secular politics.⁵³ A complex analysis of Quaker involvement in Pennsylvania politics is beyond the scope of this study, but it is important to note that Quaker women are noticeably absent from such studies. This

⁵¹Barry Levy, *Quakers and the American Family: British Settlement in the Delaware Valley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 231.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 193.

⁵³For instance, see Rufus Jones, *The Quakers in the American Colonies* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1966), 475 & Gary Nash, *Quakers and Politics: Pennsylvania, 1681-1726* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), vii-viii.

thesis suggests late-eighteenth-century Quaker women played an important role in secular politics and addresses this gap in the studies that consider eighteenth-century American Quaker involvement in politics.

The intersection of religious and secular societies during the revolutionary and early national eras continues to be a topic of historical interest. In a symposium on gender relations during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, Linda Kerber explained that historians have neglected to consider “the intersection of religion and secular discourse for women and men in the Revolutionary era.”⁵⁴ Specifically, she argued that colonial American historians need to reevaluate “the renegotiation of relations between the sexes in various religious contexts.”⁵⁵ This thesis addresses just such a need. Not only does it examine how religion influenced gendered roles and relationships, it also illustrates Quaker women’s presence beyond their homes and churches. The exile narratives indicate that in certain situations Quaker women could navigate between their church and secular communities, which is an under explored area of eighteenth-century women’s and Quaker historiography. There are numerous complexities left to consider when studying eighteenth-century Quaker women’s duties to their families and society, and this thesis addresses some of those questions.

⁵⁴Kerber et al., “Beyond Roles, Beyond Spheres,” 582.

⁵⁵Ibid., 583.

CHAPTER III

FATHERS AS MOTHERS AND MOTHERS AS FATHERS:
THE FLUIDITY OF QUAKER GENDER ROLES AND
THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FAMILY

Eighteenth-century Quaker women lived in a world of multiple and conflicting identities because gendered duties overlapped significantly for eighteenth-century Quaker men and women. Sarah Logan Fisher, Elizabeth Drinker, Mary Pemberton, and the other wives of exiled Quaker men found themselves facing a unique set of circumstances when their husbands were “torn from [them] by the hands of violent cruel men.”¹ This tragedy left them “without any visible protecting Hand to guard [them] from the ravenous wolves and lions...seeking to devour those harmless innocents that don’t go hand-in-hand with them in their cruelty and rapine.”²

An examination of relevant primary sources reveals that upon their husbands’ exiles, the wives were able to successfully juggle the roles of wife, mother, and surrogate husband. Although these roles were by no means unique to Quaker women or the exiles’ wives in particular, their situation is unusual and provides a prism through which to explore Quaker women’s roles. This chapter examines the Quaker husband-wife relationship, particularly how the emphasis in the Society of Friends on the principle of spousal equality shaped the exiles’ wives’ relationships with their families. It also explores the Quaker parent-child relationship and demonstrates that Quaker fathers had an active role in their children’s physical and spiritual well-being. Quaker parental roles were not rigid, providing further evidence of the fluidity of Quaker gendered tasks in the

¹Fisher, “September 13, 1777” in “‘A Diary of Trifling Occurrences’,” 447.

² Fisher, “September 21, 1777” in “‘A Diary of Trifling Occurrences’,” 448.

domestic setting. Finally this chapter considers the exiles' wives' responsibilities as surrogate husbands. It concludes by suggesting the women used the skills they developed as active members of the sect to assist them in the transition from wife and mother to wife, mother, and substitute father. Such examinations will shed light on some of the complexities of a Quaker woman's sense of self and will illustrate the fluidity of Quaker gender roles within the household.

During the eighteenth century, the Quaker institution of marriage was based upon the principle of the spiritual equality of the spouses. Colonial American Quakers believed that "Once married, husband and wife were to live together as helpsmeet." Because Quaker unions stressed equality, historians argue, the status of Quaker wives "was considerably higher than that of women of other sects."³ As helpsmeet, husbands and wives were expected to contribute equally to their families' spiritual growth and to show equal concern about their children's religious and secular educations.⁴ Quaker husbands and wives believed, "[W]ithin family boundaries, decision making was shared."⁵ Finally, while Quakers emphasized that when it came to choosing a spouse the partners should value spiritual over physical assets, Friends encouraged romantic and affectionate marital relationships.⁶ The bond between Quaker wives and husbands helps to explain in part why the exiles' wives may have been particularly overwhelmed by this

³Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism*, 56. Bacon stresses the idea that the Quaker marriage was an equal partnership more so than any non-Quaker union. Furthermore, she points out that Quaker husbands and wives were expected to have an equal concern in all matters relating to their marriages, including their children.

⁴Frost, *The Quaker Family in Colonial America*, 219.

⁵Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism*, 56. Bacon contends that Quaker men were responsible for making decisions pertinent to business and politics, or issues outside of the home, but this thesis will show that was not always true, as the example of the exiles' wives suggests otherwise.

⁶Frost, *The Quaker Family in Colonial America*, 219.

unexpected turn of events. Not only had they lost their husbands, but they had lost their companions and household partners.

Quaker memorials are valuable sources to understand the duties of and relationships between Quaker husbands and wives. Late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century meetings sometimes crafted and published memorial collections to celebrate and remember those who had demonstrated a “conformity in spirit and practice to the holy law of the Lord, evincing the delight and benefit to be found therein.”⁷ Philadelphia Quakers published several memorial collections to illuminate the character traits necessary to enjoy “a life of true wisdom, piety, and virtue.”⁸

The memorials reveal much about the Quaker institution of marriage, and suggest that Quaker husbands and wives enjoyed an equal partnership. A memorial for Robert Owen characterized his wife Jane as “a woman rarely endowed with many natural gifts” who lived her life as “an [*sic*] helpmeet to her husband in his exercises, solid in her deportment, and not given to many words.”⁹ Similarly, the memorial for William and Katharine Jackson, who were married around 1733, confirms that the Quaker community believed marriage should be an equal partnership. In particular, the memorial suggests that tasks generally associated with mothers, such as religious instruction of the children, concerned Quaker fathers as well. William and Katharine’s marriage was celebrated

⁷Preface to *A Collection of Memorials Concerning Divers deceased Ministers’ and others of the People called Quakers, In Pennsylvania, New-Jersey, and Parts adjacent, from nearly the first Settlement thereof to the Year 1787. With some of the last Expressions and Exhortations of many of them* (Philadelphia Printed: London Reprinted, and Sold by J. Philips, George Yard, Lombard-Street, 1788), iii.

⁸Ibid.

⁹“Rowland Ellis’s Testimony concerning Robert Owen before mentioned, and Jane his wife” in *A Collection of Memorials Concerning Divers deceased Ministers’*, 31.

because they had lived as “true help meets to each other.”¹⁰ The memorial described how both William and Katharine played an active role in the “care over their family” and did their best “to bring up their children in plainness, simplicity, [and] industry.”¹¹ Instead of distinguishing between gender-appropriate domestic roles, the memorial suggests that William and Katharine played an equal role in raising their children to be upstanding Quakers. Although most eighteenth-century Quaker unions were viewed as spiritual partnerships, historian Mary Maples Dunn indicates that the Society of Friends, more than non-Quakers, stressed that a husband and wife observe gender equality in all parts of their household, including in the instruction and guidance of their children.

The memorial for Mary Pemberton, wife of exile Israel Pemberton, describes their marriage as a union of two people who were loving, life-long companions. The memorial revealed that Mary had been married three times and each time proved herself a devoted and loving wife, especially to “her dear husband” Israel, who’s “exile...was a renewed affliction to her.”¹² On her deathbed Pemberton articulated the closeness and companionship she enjoyed with Israel, declaring, “[W]e have passed through many deep trials; [but] there is nothing between us but true love and great affection...I had some hope of continuing some time longer...on thy account,...but I am not solicitous about

¹⁰“A Testimony from New-Garden Monthly-Meeting in Pennsylvania, concerning William and Katharine Jackson” in *A Collection of Memorials Concerning Divers deceased Ministers*, 395.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 396. Early historical discussions of gendered parenting have suggested that mothers were primarily responsible for raising daughters while fathers focused on sons. This interpretation has been challenged by more recent studies, which show that mothers and fathers took an equal interest in guiding the behavior of children of both sexes. For instance, Mary Beth Norton insists, “Fathers interested themselves in many aspects of their children’s lives, peppering sons and daughters with advice” relevant to “general rules of behavior” (97). See Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters*, 97-8. This chapter finds that the Quaker father’s role in raising his children went beyond basic instruction to include a much deeper relationship with their children.

¹²“A Testimony from the Monthly-Meeting of Philadelphia, concerning Mary Pemberton” in *A Collection of Memorials Concerning Divers deceased Ministers*, 358. Mary was widowed twice, and the last of her three husbands was exile Israel Pemberton.

it.”¹³ Though she was not anxious about leaving this life and her husband, Mary Pemberton was satisfied with her long and loving marriage, which had been a consolation to her in the face of “many deep trials”.

An examination of the family papers of the Virginia exiles reveals similar sentiments expressed between husbands and wives. A letter from exile James Pemberton to his wife Phebe informed her, “[T]hy affectionate, acceptable letters... afforded me comfort & Joy on reading the general Contents.”¹⁴ Before her husband Thomas was exiled, Sarah Logan Fisher enjoyed drinking tea and supping with “[her] beloved Tommy,” who she claimed “[was] always the best of company.”¹⁵ On July 14, 1777 Fisher reflected on an afternoon she had spent with Thomas, noting they “[h]ad no company there, but we had an agreeable day alone.”¹⁶ Such a reflection suggests Sarah and Thomas enjoyed an afternoon of romance. Affectionate relationships between husbands and wives were not, of course, unique to Quakers; however, such relationships, coupled with the Quaker emphasis that spouses were to be helpsmeet to one another, helps to elucidate why the women became political activists on their husbands’ behalf.

Finally, a letter between exile James Pemberton and his adult daughter Rachel confirms the view of Quaker marriage as an equal partnership. Rachel wrote to her father that she and her husband were “a mutual comfort to each other,” and disclosed, “I

¹³“A Testimony from the Monthly-Meeting of Philadelphia, concerning Mary Pemberton” in *A Collection of Memorials Concerning Divers deceased Ministers*, 360.

¹⁴James Pemberton, “Letter from James Pemberton to His Wife, Written from ‘Exile,’” 3 April 1778, Pemberton MSS, Pemberton Manuscripts, Special Collections, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

¹⁵Fisher, “December 11, 1776” and “December 13, 1776” in “‘A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,’” 416.

¹⁶Fisher, “July 14, 1777” in “‘A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,’” 438.

do...experience in my dear [husband] a true helpmeet.”¹⁷ Rachel also gloated a bit that she had found a “sincere friend and desirable companion in [their] happy Union.”¹⁸ By taking the time to reassure her father that she enjoyed a genuine companionship with her husband, Rachel illuminated several important ideas about Quaker marriages. Quaker husbands and wives were expected to comfort one another through the most difficult of times. Being a helpmeet meant one was expected to be devoted to the happiness of his or her life-long partner. Though the idea of marital companionship was not restricted to Quakers, this idea, coupled with the notion of spousal equality, was unique to Quaker unions.¹⁹ Quaker marriages were a mixture of spousal companionship, devotion, and equality, and this is reflected in the decisions made by the Virginia exiles and their wives.

Not only was the eighteenth-century Quaker husband-wife relationship unusual in its emphasis upon companionship as a marital ideal, but the parent-child relationship was similarly close and affectionate.²⁰ While many historians insist that eighteenth-century

¹⁷Rachel Pemberton to James Pemberton, 28 January 1778, Pemberton Manuscripts, Pemberton, James 1777-1778, Letters from his children during exile in Virginia, Forms part of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Manuscripts, 1975, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA. Rachel added that her husband seldom left her side, “except when offices of humanity claim his necessary attendance.” Her husband was involved in various kinds of relief work during the war.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Mary Maples Dunn compares Puritan and Quaker marriages and concludes the Society of Friends strongly discouraged husbands from exercising patriarchal control over their wives. They were expected to be equal helpsmeet, “man and woman,” and were unlike Puritans because the Society discouraged the “fundament of inferiority and submission.” Please see Mary Maples Dunn, “Saints and Sisters: Congregational and Quaker Women in the Early Colonial Period,” *American Quarterly* 30, no. 5 (1978): 596.

²⁰Some older studies argue that eighteenth-century children were viewed as adults in training and as a source of unpaid labor. For example, Linda Grant DePauw maintains eighteenth-century parents “thought of children as animals or servants” who needed to be trained “to be obedient, respectful, well-mannered, and hard workers” (20-2). See DePauw, *Founding Mothers*. This is no longer the dominant interpretation, as many historians have subsequently documented a more “affectionate side of child-rearing” that was “symbolically linked with mothers” (Ulrich, 155). Please see Ulrich, *Good Wives*. While some historians argue that eighteenth-century mothers could and did have affectionate relationships with their children, similar studies have not been done on the father’s affectionate relationship with their

families were not child-centric and that parental attitudes towards their offspring were often distant, Quaker parents embraced parenting in a manner more common in later generations. Yet even those studies that emphasize eighteenth-century maternal affections have overlooked the role of fathers. This section explores the affectionate role Quaker fathers demonstrated in raising their children.

Quaker mothers and fathers took an active interest in developing their children's moral sensibility, and both sought to instill Quaker values in their children. Current literature argues that Quaker mothers were primarily responsible for being the family's moral guardian.²¹ However, an analysis of the exiles' correspondence suggests that Quaker fathers were also focused on assisting their children to reach adulthood as moral beings, and they frequently lectured their children about their moral obligations. Furthermore, these letters illustrate the warm relationship at least some Quaker fathers had with their children. Perhaps as a result, Quaker children cherished and respected their parents, a topic that is as yet understudied.²²

From his exile in Virginia, James Pemberton wrote numerous letters to his wife Phebe Pemberton in Philadelphia, as well as to their children Hannah, Phineas, Rachel,

children. This thesis will show Quaker fathers enjoyed close relationships with their children. A brief analysis of the Quaker father's relationship with his child is found in Frost, *The Quaker Family in Colonial America*, 86-8.

²¹Barry Levy, who has focused extensively on Quaker families, contends that one of a mother's most important duties was to instill morality in her children. As the moral guardians of their families, women were responsible for implanting "truth deeply within their children" (224). Levy insists this became a dominant trend by the mid-eighteenth century, when Quaker wives and mothers "honed their characters to instruct both husbands and children" in the faith (229). See Levy, *Quakers and the American Family*. The overlapping of parental duties within the Quaker community needs to be examined more closely.

²²It is rare to find an analysis of the colonial Quaker child's views of his or her parents. This is surprising because eighteenth-century Quakers insisted that their children, boys and girls, receive an education. Because Quakers stressed education, most children could read and write and likely recorded their impressions of their parents. This is another area of the eighteenth-century Quaker family that deserves further research.

and Sarah. Pemberton's letters reveal a deep parental concern and affection for his children. A letter dated January 24, 1778 opened by declaring Pemberton wished to give his children "proof of my parental affection,"²³ which he did by promising them, "You had been as you continue to be the objects of my frequent affectionate remembrance since...I have been undeservidly [*sic*] separated from you."²⁴ The contents and phrasing of James' letters suggest that he intended for his family to read his letters aloud, further underscoring the emotional bond between the absent Pemberton and his family. Pemberton's letters were usually addressed to "My dear children" rather than one child in particular, and one may easily imagine the children would have been delighted to read such loving expressions from their father. Phebe Pemberton would likely have found comfort in knowing that James was committed to being an active father, despite his distance and confinement. Removed from his family by time and space, James Pemberton did what he could to maintain his presence in the lives of his children.

In addition to expressing fondness for his children and his longing to be reunited with them, Pemberton's letters expressed regular interest in his children's moral and spiritual development. "My concern dear girls," he wrote to his daughters, "is often renewed for your real prosperity here and hereafter, and much depends on our own conduct for Securing an establishment therein."²⁵ Pemberton worried about his children's well-being in this life and hereafter, which explains why he continued his letter with various instructions on how they could please and obey God. After telling them to

²³James Pemberton to Hannah and Sally Pemberton, "To Hannah and Sally Pemberton, Second Street, Philadelphia from James Pemberton in Winchester," 24 January 1778, Pemberton Manuscripts, Pemberton, James, 1777-1778, Letters to family from Winchester, VA, Forms part of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Manuscripts, 1975, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵James Pemberton to Hannah and Sally Pemberton, 24 January 1778.

“seek first & principally the Kingdom of Christ & his righteousness,” he reminded the girls to be thankful for all they were blessed with and asked that they not let “the present affliction” weaken their faith.²⁶

Although James felt the need to provide his children with detailed instructions on how to behave, this does not mean he questioned their mother’s ability to lead them. He viewed the parental role as a partnership and felt that even in his absence he needed to play an active role in their children’s upbringing. Pemberton concluded his letter by informing his children, “[I]t has been a pleasure to me often to observe the just sentiments you have formed.”²⁷ Not only did this statement illustrate his love for and pride in his children, it also demonstrated that he understood his position as a source of guidance and comfort for his children. Pemberton’s letters to his children suggest he did his best to remain a part of his children’s daily lives, despite his absence.

In another letter addressed to “My dear Children,” Pemberton thanked his daughters Hannah and Sally for their frequent letters, which he said brought him considerable joy. He wrote, “Your several letters which lately came to my hands I received with paternal love, as proofs of your sympathy, and dutiful affection.”²⁸ Not only did Pemberton thank his children for writing to him, but more importantly he found delight in their “dutiful affection”. Old enough to articulate their sentiments and sense of duty to their parents, but still young enough to need parental guidance, the Pemberton girls were a source of joy to their father, who reveled in their many expressions of filial

²⁶James Pemberton to Hannah and Sally Pemberton, 24 January 1778.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸James Pemberton to Hannah and Sally Pemberton, “For Hannah and Sally Pemberton in Philadelphia from James Pemberton in Winchester”, 27 December 1777, Pemberton Manuscripts, Pemberton, James, 1777-1778, Letters to family from Winchester, VA, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

devotion. Hannah and Sally also made James happy because of their affection for their mother Phebe. Pemberton praised the girls for “[t]he affectionate manner in which” they cared for their “dear mother,” and let them know that he found comfort in knowing they were doing what they could “to alleviate her various troubles, & afflictions.”²⁹

Pemberton ended his letter with, “I salute you with Sincere paternal Affection and am Your tender Loving Father.”³⁰

James Pemberton’s letters to his wife Phebe also echo his paternal regard for their children and his interest in their moral characters. Worried that his separation from the family would have a negative effect on his children’s development, one of Pemberton’s letters expressed his wish that the family retain their “conformity to the Simplicity of our Christian profession in conduct & dress.”³¹ Implicitly recognizing that children needed both their parents, Pemberton used the forum of his letters to give instruction as if he had been at home. This same letter, dated April 3, 1778, addressed a rumor that “some youth nearly connected with some of my fellow Exiles have rather diviated [*sic*] into greater extremes of vanity & folly in dress & associates.”³² Apparently realizing their mothers were distracted by their expanded responsibilities and by concern over their husbands’ confinement, some of the exiles’ children had begun to reject the Quakers’ strict dress codes and limited interaction with non-Quakers. James interpreted these behaviors as “proof of great weakness and inconsideration” on the part of the young people who

²⁹James Pemberton to Hannah and Sally Pemberton, 27 December 1777.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹James Pemberton, “Letter from James Pemberton to His Wife, Written from ‘Exile,’” 3 April 1778, Pemberton MSS, Pemberton Manuscripts, Special Collections, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

³²James Pemberton, “Letter from James Pemberton to His Wife,” 3 April 1778.

seemed to be taking advantage of their fathers' absence to run wild.³³ Although some of the exiles were troubled over learning of their children's misbehavior, James anticipated he would hear of no such problems from his wife. Just to be safe, Pemberton told Phebe that he hoped "for better things from those in whose welfare [*sic*] I am most immediately concerned."³⁴

James Pemberton's relationship with his children was not unusual, as other exiles articulated similar paternal affection. In a letter written before the exile, on his first day of confinement in the Mason's Lodge, Henry Drinker lectured his children about how they should behave in his absence. Perhaps anticipating the exile, Drinker wrote, "[Y]ou my dear Children manifest your concern, if you really feel for your Father, by abiding at Home...in stillness and quietness."³⁵ Drinker realized the distress the situation was causing his wife Elizabeth and wanted their children to be on their best behavior so as not to add to her troubles. Not only was Elizabeth faced with the loss of her husband during his "present confinement," but she had to devote time and attention to their "dear son Henry's diseased State & reduced Situation," as he had fallen ill only a week or so before his father's arrest.³⁶ Faced with the loss of her husband for an indeterminate period, and the possible loss of an ill child, Elizabeth Drinker could at least count on her husband's and children's emotional support.

³³James Pemberton, "Letter from James Pemberton to His Wife," 3 April 1778.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Henry Drinker to Elizabeth Drinker, 3 September 1777, Henry Drinker Papers to 1867 (Letters of Correspondence), Special Collections, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

³⁶Ibid. According to Elizabeth's diary, Henry had fallen ill around August 21. He started vomiting and experienced "disordered Bowels, occasion'd [*sic*] by eating watermelon [*sic*] too close to the Rine [*sic*]." After expelling three worms, vomiting "one alive," his health continued to fail for the next two weeks. Though he was "reduced almost to a Skelaton [*sic*]," his appetite slowly returned and his health improved. Please see Drinker, "August 20 or 21, 1777" in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Crane (1994), 60 for this description.

Drinker wrote frequently to his family during his exile. In most of his letters he expressed some form of guidance or paternal love. A letter written February 7, 1778 included repeated affectionate references to his children. He conveyed the gravity of his separation from his beloved connections when he pronounced, “As a Husband, a Father, & a Friend, the present separation from a beloved wife, [and] tender children...is a close trial & at times powerfully assault[s] the Man.”³⁷ Angered over his continued confinement, Drinker found his situation more painful still because of the enforced separation from his family.

In the same letter, Henry Drinker relayed to Elizabeth political news pertinent to his exile and articulated his concern for his children in detail. He noted that reading Elizabeth’s descriptions of his little darlings brought him considerable joy. Referencing her letter of February 5, 1778, Drinker replied that he found comfort in knowing their children were well-behaved: “Every Relation given of our precious Children I find myself deeply Interested in, & what thou says of our Boys & two eldest Girls was comfortable.”³⁸ Drinker’s discussion of his relationship with his daughter Molly, still a toddler, particularly illustrates his paternal love. He declared, “Altho’ [*sic*] our dear little Molly was not mention’d [*sic*], I...have no doubt she is one of her Mother’s comforts—the sweet prattler is not forgotten by her Father, & when she is mention’d [*sic*] my feelings testify that she is near my Heart.”³⁹ Before concluding, Drinker requested that

³⁷Henry Drinker to Elizabeth Drinker, “Addressed to Elizabeth Drinker, Philadelphia,” 7 February 1778, Henry Drinker Papers to 1867 (Letters of Correspondence), Special Collections, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

³⁸Henry Drinker to Elizabeth Drinker, 7 February 1778.

³⁹Ibid. Their daughter Molly was born in 1774, making her very young at the time of Henry’s banishment. This no doubt was painful for Henry, as parents enjoy watching their young children grow. Perhaps this is why he mentions her in particular.

Elizabeth, “Tell her that I love her at this distance & kiss her for me.”⁴⁰ It is notable that Henry found comfort in remembering the sweet prattling of his dear little Molly; what’s more, he was able to describe such sentiments in dramatic detail. This suggests he paid close attention to his toddler daughter and recalled with fondness her every feature. It is rare to find a father who describes in such vivid detail the tender moments he shared with his young children, especially during the eighteenth century.⁴¹ Henry, however, had no reservations over expressing these emotions to his beloved wife and children and wished for them to understand how much he adored them.

The correspondence from the Philadelphia Quakers exiled to Virginia also sheds light on how Quaker children felt about their parents. The Pemberton family letters in particular indicate the children cherished their relationship with their parents and possessed a strong sense of filial regard. In a letter from December 19, 1777, Sarah Pemberton wrote to her father James, “I have the vanity to imagine a few lines from an affectionate Daughter will not be unacceptable, when she endeavors to express her sentiments with all that warmth of gratitude, which is due to the best of Parents.”⁴² In an attempt to please her father, she mused, “[M]ay I still be improving by this Lesson of

⁴⁰Henry Drinker to Elizabeth Drinker, 7 February 1778.

⁴¹Historians have documented the change in attitudes towards child-rearing between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For instance, Linda Pollock outlines the arguments that show that during the early modern period, English parents began adopting a more permissive style of child rearing that emphasized love and affection over fear and intimidation as effective tools for parenting. Historians characterize this change as gradual and suggest parents did not fully appreciate the joys of parenthood until the nineteenth century. Please see Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 18-20 for more information.

⁴²Sarah Pemberton to James Pemberton, “To James Pemberton at Winchester in Virginia,” 19 December 1777, Pemberton Manuscripts, Pemberton, James 1777-1778, Letters from his children during exile in Virginia, Forms part of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Manuscripts, 1975, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

Wisdom in that, which will obtain me, a glorious Hereafter.”⁴³ Her father, who worried about Sarah’s physical and spiritual well-being, would have been happy to read she was working on deepening her faith. Sarah signed her letter “thy dutiful Daughter,” a signature commonly used by children to express devotion to a beloved parent. Sarah’s letters illustrate that Quaker children did have close loving relationships with both parents, not just with their mothers. Sarah’s frequent correspondence with her father during his absence reassured him of their strong ties and reminded him that he had a devoted family anxiously awaiting his return. In turn, the letters from Pemberton’s children served as a constant reminder to their father of the special and intimate relationship they shared.

Many of Sarah Pemberton’s other letters to her father echo the love and attachment of a devoted child.⁴⁴ On January 7, 1778 Sarah thanked him for his frequent letters and explained that they were “expressive of every kind, very endearing sentiment of paternal Regard.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, his letters “excited in [her] breast the warmest emotions of Gratitude and filial sympathy whose agreeable sensations will never be erased from an [*sic*] heart that is ever willing to please and oblige...Parents.”⁴⁶ James and Phebe Pemberton’s daughter Hannah expressed similar sentiments, though her letter

⁴³Sarah Pemberton to James Pemberton, 19 December 1777.

⁴⁴The Pemberton manuscripts at the Friends’ Historical Library at Swarthmore College include a set of letters to James from his children during his exile. The collection includes letters from his daughters Hannah, Rachel, and Sarah, though some of the letters are signed by “Sally.” According to historian Carolyn Lawes, Sally was used as an informal version of Sarah during this period, so it is acceptable to assume the letters from “Sally” were written by Sarah Pemberton. There is no indication James had a daughter formally named Sally, only Sarah.

⁴⁵Sally Pemberton to James Pemberton, 7 January 1778, Pemberton Manuscripts, Pemberton, James 1777-1778, Letters from his children during exile in Virginia, Forms part of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Manuscripts, 1975, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

articulated more sadness than those of her sisters. She wrote, “Alas my Parent and art thou yet absent? is...Filial Love, and every endearing type of affection still doomed to lament the separation of their dear domestic Comforter and most affectionate Friend[?]”⁴⁷ Hannah’s musings suggest that she viewed her father less as a patriarch and authority figure and more as a supportive friend.

Hannah’s letter also indicates she experienced many difficulties during the family’s separation. Married and a mother herself, Hannah was old enough and wise enough to recognize the severity of her father’s confinement and the implications of his absence for his family. Not only did Hannah worry that she and her siblings might never see their father again, but she worried because her mother had fallen ill and because James was not there to witness the development of her infant son, whom she described to her father as his “pretty little grand-Son.” Hannah indicated the one thing that would restore her happiness was “the return of my beloved Connection...to his afflicted Family.”⁴⁸

This section has shown that Quaker fathers cultivated a strong and affectionate relationship with their children of both sexes. Historical interpretations that argue that eighteenth-century fathers were primarily providers and authority figures do not apply to Quakers, and such a revelation indicates that historians need to reevaluate if these ideas indeed applied elsewhere. The implications of these relationships are profound, as this indicates that Quaker mothers’ and fathers’ roles were not as rigid as some have argued. As Quaker fathers, the exiles demonstrated an equal concern over their children’s

⁴⁷Hannah Pemberton to James Pemberton, 3 January 1778, Pemberton Manuscripts, Pemberton, James 1777-1778, Letters from his children during exile in Virginia, Forms part of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Manuscripts, 1975, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.

⁴⁸Ibid.

development. By suggesting that Quaker fathers and mothers doted on and loved their children in similar ways, it can be argued that Quaker fathers were more than just heads of their households.

Eighteenth-century women often found themselves facing circumstances that required them to act as surrogate husbands and fathers.⁴⁹ The Quaker women whose husbands had been exiled for suspected disloyalty to the revolution had to become surrogate husbands to ensure the survival of their families. They were successful in doing so because they viewed that role as a natural extension of their role as their husbands' helpsmeet. The wives knew they were expected to be "proper & suitable Helpmates [*sic*]"⁵⁰ to their husbands through all of life's trials, so they did not hesitate to become the providers and protectors for themselves, their families, and their husbands when they needed to. This does not mean to suggest that they did not experience difficulties in such endeavors; in fact, both Drinker and Fisher expressed anxiety over the additional responsibilities that came with being a surrogate husband. What is important, though, is that the exiles' wives stepped up when needed and became temporary fathers during their husbands' confinement.

The women's ability to become successful surrogates was an outgrowth of the general gender equality prevalent in Quakerism. Because the Society of Friends did not define gender roles as rigidly as other denominations, the women's sense of self gave

⁴⁹The terms surrogate husband and deputy husband are used interchangeably to describe this role. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich employs both and she defines a surrogate or deputy husband as a woman who "shouldered male duties" either as a helper or as a surrogate when circumstances required (9). For more information, please see Ulrich, *Good Wives*, 9 & 36-50. The expectation that women would fulfill this role when needed was not unique to the Quaker community, because any woman's husband could have been arrested or killed during the war.

⁵⁰M. Morris, "Copy of a Letter from M[.] Morris," 2 January 1755 in *Milcah Martha Moore's Book: A Commonplace Book from Revolutionary America*, ed. Catherine La Courreye Blecki and Karin A. Wulf (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 226.

them confidence that they could and must preserve their homes and families in the absence of their husbands. The ultimate goal was the restoration of their families to a two-parent household, but until that was possible the women had to protect themselves and their children and carry on with their daily lives.

Sarah Logan Fisher's diary illuminates the many new duties she inherited as a result of her husband Thomas' absence. Before his arrest and banishment to Virginia, many of Fisher's diary entries described her participation in leisure activities, such as drinking tea with other Friends or entertaining her extended family. These types of entries disappear after her husband's exile and were replaced with descriptions of Sarah's "busy" days spent searching for provisions. For instance, she spent October 21, 1777 shopping and purchased "two live hogs, a quarter of beef, & a bushel of turnips."⁵¹ Most days, though, it was a challenge for Sarah to provide, no matter how hard she tried. The exiles had been arrested at a critical moment, and the city was especially dangerous during the men's banishment. The men's absence left their families vulnerable to the dangers of war, such as starvation or attacks by disorderly armies.⁵²

A diary entry for November 1, 1777, records an especially difficult day for Sarah. She described "the dreadful situation" her family had been "reduced to," as a result of a

⁵¹Fisher, "October 21, 1777" in "A Diary of Trifling Occurrences," 453. Though Sarah did some shopping alone when Thomas was home, she often noted that he would accompany her on such errands.

⁵²During the time the men lived in exile, Philadelphia was destitute and dangerous. Inflation was rampant, the city was under British occupation and was close to some of the bloodiest clashes of the war, and rowdy troops from both sides frequented the streets and destroyed homes, crops, and livestock. These problems undoubtedly made it more difficult for the exiles' wives to care for their families. Although Chapter One indicates that the Virginia exiles and their wives enjoyed a prominent social and economic standing in the decades leading up to the conflict, this does not mean the families were immune to the deprivation that came with the war. Fisher's diary in particular suggests she had a difficult time providing for her children. Despite some hardships, however, the exiles' wives fared better than other women of the lower class and managed to support their families. It is reasonable to assume they were able to do so because of their access to and knowledge of their husbands' business affairs. The women's social and economic status before the war was closely linked to their survival during the men's banishment.

combination of scarce resources and wartime inflation.⁵³ She was troubled by “the prospect of [her] little children having nothing to eat but salt meat & biscuit,” but found hope and encouragement in God, whom she relied upon for support when her husband could not be there.⁵⁴ This statement reveals much about Sarah’s identity as a surrogate husband. Though she “had to think & provide everything for [her] family, at a time when it [was] so difficult to provide anything at almost any price,”⁵⁵ she found a way. On this particular day in November she managed to bring home two cows to provide her family with much-needed milk and beef.⁵⁶ What Sarah could not purchase she received from friends, but no matter how grim the circumstances, she always ensured her children had something to eat.⁵⁷

In addition to searching for scarce resources in a destitute and occupied city, Sarah Logan Fisher also was responsible for guarding what she did have from the demands of the needy patriot soldiers. On September 22, 1777, two officers appeared on Sarah’s doorstep and “demanded blankets or old carpets.” Sarah was determined to send them away with nothing, and noted, “I told them I had none, that I had never given them any, but that they had robbed me of...my dear husband, & that I could by no means

⁵³Fisher, “November 1, 1777” in “‘A Diary of Trifling Occurrences’,” 455.

⁵⁴Ibid., 456.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid. Sarah mentions Thomas Clousdale, a family friend, helped her purchase these cows for a reasonable price. Please see Fisher, “November 1, 1777” in “‘A Diary of Trifling Occurrences’,” 455.

encourage war of any kind.”⁵⁸ She “positively refused” to allow the men to take anything from her home, and they left empty-handed.

This seemingly minor diary entry reveals a great deal about how Sarah Logan Fisher interpreted and understood her role. First, although Fisher often complained that she felt weak without her husband, her diary suggests that she was much stronger than she believed. The Quaker emphasis upon equality of the sexes and upon women speaking in public as equals apparently gave Sarah the confidence to refuse the demands of officers of the revolutionary army. Not only had she sent them away with nothing, but she did so after explaining that her husband was away and that she did not support the war effort. While this could have put her and her children in grave danger, Sarah was determined to keep the scarce supplies she knew they would need to get through the winter, and more importantly, through Thomas’ absence. It is reasonable to conclude that a non-Quaker woman might not have had the experience or self-confidence to respond so forcefully.

Indeed, in refusing to give the officers the blankets they sought, Sarah was imitating what she had witnessed her husband do in a similar situation a few months earlier. On April 14, 1777, she noted in her diary that some men knocked at the door and demanded “to know what provisions we had in the house.”⁵⁹ Sarah watched as Thomas “told them he should not give them any satisfaction what we had,” and the men “said but little & went away.”⁶⁰ When faced with a similar dilemma on her own, Sarah proved to be an ideal surrogate husband. Just as Thomas had been unwavering in his refusal to

⁵⁸Fisher, “September 22, 1777” in “‘A Diary of Trifling Occurrences’,” 449.

⁵⁹Fisher, “April 14, 1777” in “‘A Diary of Trifling Occurrences’,” 432.

⁶⁰Ibid.

supply the soldiers with much-needed blankets, Sarah was firm in her refusal to relinquish the few blankets her family needed to survive the approaching winter. On this and other occasions she did what Thomas would likely have done had he been home.

Experiences such as these led Sarah to develop a new-found confidence in her ability to support and protect her family. On December 5, 1777 she recalled the clashes between the Continental Army and British troops over the previous weeks, noting that the combat on November 21 had been especially brutal. On that day she heard “the dreadful noise” of the “vessels [blowing] up with an explosion like an earthquake.”⁶¹ So violent were the artillery blasts that Fisher had trouble sleeping because her bed shook with every roar of the cannons. Instead of turning to her husband for comfort as she might have done in other circumstances, Fisher focused on how best to protect her children should the fighting put them in danger: “[I] thought if the town was set on fire what I should do with myself & little children, yet I was supported under it with great calmness.”⁶² Compare this statement with one Fisher had expressed only two months earlier, when she felt “Solitary & alone, &...weak as if almost unable to support the painful anxiety of my mind.”⁶³ Feeling solitary, alone, and weak was simply not an option for a woman on her own with children to care for in the midst of contending armies. In only a few short months, she had become comfortable with her new role.

Sarah Logan Fisher’s transition from mother to surrogate husband and mother may have been less difficult for her than for other women because of her Quaker upbringing. Because Quaker gender roles were not rigidly defined, but assumed that

⁶¹Fisher, “December 5, 1777” in “‘A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,’” 457.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Fisher, “September 21, 1777” in “‘A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,’” 448.

parents shared an equal responsibility for the family's well-being, Sarah was prepared to assume her husband Thomas' responsibilities in his absence. She viewed this duty as an extension of her role as helpmeet and as her duty as a Quaker wife and mother.

Elizabeth Drinker also became a surrogate husband when her husband Henry was banished to Virginia. Drinker, however, faced different circumstances than Sarah Logan Fisher and was more detailed in her descriptions of what the transition to surrogate husband meant for her. While Fisher mentions only once that she was compelled to lodge an officer, Drinker noted on several occasions that she had to protect her home from the constant requests to quarter soldiers. She feared that to allow a soldier to live in her home would endanger her and her children; what if she faced retribution from the opposing troops for quartering an enemy soldier? This was not a risk Elizabeth was willing to take, and so she adamantly refused each request. On October 6 she sent an officer on his way when he asked "if we could take in a Sick or Wounded Captain."⁶⁴ Drinker "put him off by saying that as my Husband was from me, I should be pleas'd [*sic*] if he could provide some other convenient place."⁶⁵ In this instance, Drinker appealed to the officer's sense of propriety to avoid quartering an ill or injured soldier, whose presence in the household meant an additional burden in terms of care and labor. Drinker's strategy was not always successful, and she did not hesitate to become more assertive when she felt it necessary. Three months after the first incident, another officer arrived at the Drinker home looking for "Quarters for some Oiffecer [*sic*] of

⁶⁴Drinker, "October 6, 1777" in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Crane (1994), 64.

⁶⁵Ibid.

distinction.”⁶⁶ Drinker insisted that she find his superior a home someplace else, and the gentleman tried to persuade her that her family would be safer with a man in the house to protect them. Drinker was not convinced, and after informing the officer that she “desir’d to be excused” she sent him on his way.⁶⁷ In her husband’s absence, Elizabeth Drinker felt it was her responsibility to protect her home and family, not a stranger’s.

Drinker also had to guard her family’s supplies from the threat of plunder from the ravaging armies, a task which would have fallen to Henry Drinker had he been home. Doing so could be simple, as it was on September 15 when Drinker hid her cow and horse in the wash house while soldiers searched the stable.⁶⁸ On other occasions, however, Drinker discovered it was much more difficult to protect her supplies from hostile troops. On November 5, Drinker described an incident when a blanket was stolen from her house. A soldier came to her door and demanded blankets, “which I did not in any wise agree to,” but when she refused the soldier pushed Drinker aside “and took one...as it was G. Howes [*sic*] orders.”⁶⁹ Had Henry Drinker been at home, he may or may not have been able to stop the soldier from seizing the family’s belongings, but all Drinker could do was berate the man and be thankful that he had not taken more.

Drinker’s most troublesome task was protecting her home and her children from the frequently rowdy and drunk soldiers, a task she proved more than capable of. At around nine o’clock in the evening on November 25, Drinker and her family were startled

⁶⁶Drinker, “December 18, 1777” in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Crane (1994), 69.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Drinker, “September 15, 1777” in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Crane (1994), 62.

⁶⁹Drinker, “November 5, 1777” in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Crane (1994), 66.

by the sounds of a confrontation in the yard between Drinker's sister and a young, drunken officer.⁷⁰ Her sister had "discovered a Young Officer with Ann [one of Drinker's servants] coming out from the little House," possibly one of the outbuildings of the Drinker home. When "Sister" demanded to know what they were doing, the young man's "answer was whats [*sic*] that to you."⁷¹ The argument escalated and soon Drinker, the officer, Drinker's servant Ann, and Drinker's sister ended up in the kitchen. Although Drinker and her sister ordered the officer to leave, he refused and they did not feel capable of throwing him out bodily. At this point a family friend who was visiting, Chalkley James, joined the fray and confronted the officer. After a heated exchange, the officer "shook his Sword" at James, who lunged at the drunk soldier and wrestled the weapon from his grasp.⁷²

Elizabeth Drinker initially watched the scene unfold in horror but quickly shifted into survival mode. While her sister tried to hide the sword, Drinker gathered the children in the parlor. Somehow James became trapped in another room during the altercation, and the officer stormed through the house cursing before bursting the parlor and threatening Drinker and the children.⁷³ The belligerent man then stumbled about the house in search of more alcohol, allowing Drinker and the children, who were "never so frightened," the opportunity to secure the parlor against him, and eventually the man

⁷⁰Here Drinker used "Sister" to describe the woman who was home with her and her children on this particular evening. It is not clear if this was Drinker's biological sister or a close family connection. Drinker also did not specify whether the drunken soldier was American or British. She simply described him as young and boisterous.

⁷¹Drinker, "November 25, 1777" in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Crane (1994), 66. Ann was one of the family servants. Elizabeth referred to her as "our saucy Ann."

⁷²Ibid., 68.

⁷³Ibid., 66.

left.⁷⁴ Once he was out of sight, Drinker ordered the house and the gate be locked against the possibility that the officer might return.

The Drinker family's frightening encounter with an armed and drunk officer illustrates the quick thinking and ability to respond to threats required of a surrogate husband, especially in wartime. Although Chalkley James was able to wrestle with the man long enough to allow Drinker to sequester herself and her children in relative safety, she remained calm throughout the incident. She gathered her children and secured them in a place where she thought they would not be harmed and took what steps she could to prevent another altercation. Drinker was unsettled by the incident but never indicated that she found her duties as the protector of her family to be too much for her. She did what she had to do because the circumstances required it.

In addition to protecting her family, Drinker assumed another duty that had previously fallen to her husband: debt collection. Before Henry Drinker's exile, Elizabeth had assisted him by recording his business transactions and maintaining financial records. Henry was a prominent merchant whose business "took [him] from home with a frequency that Elizabeth initially resented,"⁷⁵ which had given her experience in running the business. With Henry confined in Winchester, Virginia, it fell to Elizabeth to ensure the family's income and to manage Henry's financial affairs. Elizabeth proved to be savvy when it came to collecting and managing the money necessary to keep her household stable without Henry. Not long after the incident with the drunken officer, Drinker halted that same officer as he passed by her door and criticized him for not compensating her family for the time her servant had spent with

⁷⁴Drinker, "November 25, 1777" in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Crane (1994), 66.

⁷⁵Crane, ed., *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker* (1994), xi.

him. Chastising the officer for a lack of “Religion or Virtue,” she threatened to expose his poor character “if thee don’t very soon pay me for my Servants time.”⁷⁶ The man denied Drinker’s accusations, but she held firm, insisting “If he did not bring the Money [sic] or send it soon he should hear further from me.”⁷⁷ Taken aback by Drinker’s composure and demands, the officer became flustered, muttered “well, well, well,” and left, “seemingly confus’d [sic]” and leaving Drinker in command of the situation.⁷⁸

Further evidence that Drinker was a successful surrogate husband rests in the fact that she managed other business affairs while Henry was in exile. Drinker mentioned on April 1, 1778 that she had sent her son Billy to fetch John Burket, who owed the family money: “I demanded the Money which has been so long owing, [and] he promised to pay it next seventh Day.”⁷⁹ Not satisfied with his response, Elizabeth decided to get more information about Burket’s finances and called on Abel James, Henry’s business partner in their mercantile firm, to ask for J. Burket’s account records. Drinker was frustrated to learn Burket’s loan was not in the “Company Books,” because this meant she had no record of how much she should collect.⁸⁰ It is not clear if Burket ever paid what he owed as promised, but the incident indicates yet another of the many responsibilities Elizabeth Drinker assumed when Henry was exiled. It is also telling that Abel James was comfortable discussing company affairs with Elizabeth, for it suggests that he had likely done so prior to Henry’s confinement. Had Henry Drinker not involved

⁷⁶Drinker, “January 4, 1778” in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Crane (1994), 71.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Drinker, “April 1, 1778” in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Crane (1994), 66.

⁸⁰Ibid.

Elizabeth in his business transactions prior to his arrest, she may not have been able to support her children during his absence.

The wartime diaries of the wives of the Virginia exiles' reveal how they coped with unprecedented circumstances. The women were governed by their understanding of their duties as Quaker wives and mothers. Elizabeth Drinker demonstrated self-confidence when physically threatened, and was not shy about confrontation in the service of her family, as she demonstrated in her interactions with the boorish officer. In fact, her persistence intimidated those who owed her family money. Drinker's experience in the Quaker meetings gave her the confidence to demand action from others, and her involvement in Henry Drinker's affairs gave her the skills to negotiate business. It is unclear whether the officer ever paid Drinker for her servant's time, but we can be sure that if he did it was only because of Drinker's confidence and forceful demeanor.

The situations facing Fisher, Drinker, and other women whose husbands had been exiled were not unprecedented, for their husbands had often included them in the management of business affairs. The exiles' correspondence also reveals that Quaker mothers and fathers interacted similarly with their children and that Quaker fathers were concerned with, and took a role in, their children's development. In addition, the evidence suggests that Quaker women were actively involved in the family's business affairs and could be providers for and protectors of their children when it was necessary for them to do so.

This chapter has argued Quaker men and women enjoyed fluidity between gender roles and were not limited to specific expectations based on traditional notions of masculinity or femininity. The exiled men's actions suggest that Quaker fathers often

'acted like mothers', because they enjoyed affectionate and close relationships with their children similar to the Quaker mother-child relationship. In addition, Quaker mothers sometimes 'acted like fathers', because the exiles' wives protected and supported their homes and children when their husbands could not do so. The following chapter will show that the exiles' wives not only kept their families together in the absence of their husbands, but they played a key role in the men's eventual release. Once again, they accomplished this by drawing upon their expectations as Quaker wives and mothers, and their actions illustrate the flexibility of Quaker women's roles in their households.

CHAPTER IV
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY QUAKER WOMEN'S PRESENCE
IN CHURCH AND SECULAR POLITICS

Chapter Three demonstrated how the exiles' families coped in the absence of their husbands and fathers. Governed by their identities as Quaker mothers, the women became surrogate husbands and fathers to ensure their families' survival. Before the war the exiles' wives did not collect family debts, defend their children and households from armed intruders, or find themselves solely responsible for acquiring and stocking provisions. But they adapted because Quaker definitions of familial responsibility, as well as their religious commitment, gave them the skills to continue their lives. Although the separation brought the families "great distress,"¹ the women carried on to the best of their abilities and did not allow the banishment of their husbands to interrupt their responsibility to their children. But it did temporarily change their way of life.

While Chapter Three discussed what the Virginia exile incident reveals about Quaker women's roles and Quaker familial ties in the domestic setting, this chapter explores the impact of the women's experiences more broadly. The exile episode illustrates Quaker women's duties as wives and mothers and their political activism were closely linked. The wives became active in secular politics when their families and their livelihoods were threatened. The women were fueled by their desire to preserve their families, protect their children, and bring their husbands home.² Each of these goals,

¹Elizabeth Drinker, "September 5 1777" in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, Vol. I, 1758-1795, ed. Elaine Forman Crane (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 227.

²A close examination of Drinker's and Fisher's diaries and of Drinker, Fisher, and Pemberton family papers suggests that the women were not active in politics prior to their husbands' exile. This

even those that required them to step out of their traditional gender role, was appropriate for devout Quaker women, and so their activities fit their religious role. This chapter will also show how the women's Quaker beliefs and upbringing gave them the tools to successfully petition and protest their loved ones' arrest and confinement.³ One of the basic principles of the Quaker faith was the spiritual equality of the sexes, and Quaker women frequently participated in the politics of governing the sect.⁴ This experience in church politics could and did cross over into secular politics.

Indeed the exiles' wives, as well as most Quaker women of the era, were an active presence in politics. Whether they preached to other Friends during Quaker meetings, became traveling preachers with husbands and children in tow, or petitioned secular leaders, Quaker women had the foundation and the experience necessary to successfully navigate between their duties as good wives and mothers and their wartime role as outspoken public and political activists. Unlike non-Quakers, Friends stressed the idea of gender equality "in all business and organizational matters" of the sect.⁵ To be sure,

chapter will discuss their political activities within the Quaker sect and their secular community and will show that foundations of the faith allowed Quaker women a presence in public Quaker and secular politics.

³For a solid analysis of Quaker women's participation in a parallel meeting system, see Dunn, "Saints and Sisters," 595-6 & 598-600. Dunn points out that early Quaker leaders "had a great deal to do with the formation of...women's meetings and saw them as an instrument for the expansion of woman's role" in the sect (598).

⁴The tradition of Quaker women's presence in church government and church leadership positions can be traced to Margaret Fell, also known as the "Mother of Quakerism." This chapter examines the foundations of the Quaker faith, particularly women's roles in the church, and it argues that Margaret Fell and other female members of the Quaker founding elite were held up as ideal examples of respectable Quaker women. They established the precedent of women's active leadership in the church and paved the way for future Quaker women to become prominent, valued members of their church communities. By considering the exiles' wives activities in and out of their church, we see that they lived up to the ideals mapped out by Fell and other first-generation Quaker women. This illuminates why the exiles' wives were not criticized as unfeminine or out of line by their contemporaries; they were only doing what was expected of upstanding Quaker women, wives, and mothers.

⁵"The role of women," <http://www.quaker.org.uk/Templates/Interal.asp?NodeID=90276>, (accessed 15 March 2007).

Quaker women were considered responsible for “different kinds of talents, roles and tasks” unique to their gender.⁶ However, they were also expected to be devoted servants of God and active members in the management of the sect. Their role in the Society of Friends is best characterized by the principle of separate but equal, and women held their own, separate meetings where they were charged with making decisions pertinent to the management of their sect.

Quaker memorials are excellent sources to understand the character traits Friends valued and celebrated. Two collections in particular, “A Collection of Memorials Concerning Divers deceased Ministers and others of the People called Quakers” and “Memorials Concerning Deceased Friends,” include hundreds of descriptions of Friends who embodied Quaker virtue. Compiled and published in Philadelphia during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, the purpose of the memorials was to provide “information, edification, and encouragement,” particularly “to the [Quaker] youth, who may derive profitable instruction” from their deceased Friends.⁷

The memorials confirm that mid-eighteenth century Quaker women became active in politics, particularly within the church, and that their participation was valued. One memorial written by the attendants of the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting celebrated a woman named Elizabeth Drinker (not the same Elizabeth Drinker who is a main character of this thesis). Drinker was characterized as a “beloved friend” who left her contemporaries “with a solid sense and remembrance of her gospel labors and services.”⁸

⁶“The role of women,” <http://www.quaker.org.uk/Templates/Interal.asp?NodeID=90276>, (accessed 15 March 2007).

⁷Preface to *A Collection of Memorials Concerning Divers deceased Ministers*, 310.

⁸“Testimony from the Monthly Meeting of Philadelphia, for the Southern District, concerning Elizabeth Drinker” in *Memorials Concerning Deceased Friends: Being a Selection from the Records of the*

In addition to adopting a strict sense of piety and submission to God, the memorial indicates that Drinker “came forth in public ministry” in 1776 at the age of thirty-nine.⁹ There is no evidence that Drinker married, which suggests it was socially acceptable for a Quaker woman to choose a life as a public servant and a traveling minister. Drinker’s memorial also describes her as “frequently engaged in visiting the meetings of Friends in this and several of the adjacent governments.”¹⁰ Not only did Drinker make frequent trips to different Meeting Houses, but she was also described as “peculiarly fitted to speak with precision to the states of individuals, both in families and more public opportunities.”¹¹ Elizabeth Drinker spent most of her adult life engaged in the Quaker ministry, speaking both to individuals and families as well as to audiences eager to hear her gospel. In the process, she demonstrated that Quakers must be “serviceable in the exercise and support of [their] Christian discipline.”¹²

Drinker’s activities were not limited to Philadelphia and the surrounding meeting houses; when she was fifty-six she sailed to Great Britain to spread the “sound and weighty” gospel.¹³ It is not known how many witnessed Drinker’s public testimonies as she traveled through London, Kent, Bristol, Sussex, and Falmouth, but her memorial indicates that she spoke “instructively and encouragingly” until she “breathed her last” on

Yearly Meeting for Pennsylvania, &c. From the Years 1783 to 1819, Inclusive (Philadelphia: Printed and sold by Solomon W. Conrad, No. 87, Market-Street, 1821), 52.

⁹Ibid., 53.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³“Testimony from Grace Church-Street Monthly Meeting concerning Elizabeth Drinker” in *Memorials Concerning Deceased Friends*, 55.

August 10, 1794.¹⁴ Drinker had devoted eighteen years of her life to the Quaker ministry. She had a profound impact upon at least some of her contemporaries, and symbolized what other Quaker women should strive to become.

Just as important as what the memorials emphasize is what they omit: there is no discussion in the memorial of Drinker marrying. We can be certain that she was not married because Quaker memorials inevitably addressed the subject's marriage in the first few paragraphs. Many Quaker women, like Drinker, decided not to marry and chose to become active in the public ministry, but the last section of Drinker's memorial is unusual because it offers insight into how Drinker felt about her choices.¹⁵ Shortly before she passed away, Drinker spoke to a group of Friends and proclaimed that it "was right that she had given up all, and left home."¹⁶ In saying this, Drinker meant that she had chosen not to pursue a traditional life, one where she likely would have become a wife and a mother. As historian Rebecca Larson has shown, the option to choose a life as a traveling preacher made Quaker women unusual for their day. Similarly, historian Karin Wulf has found that eighteenth-century Quaker women could have an identity

¹⁴"Testimony from Grace Church-Street" in *Memorials Concerning Deceased Friends*, 55-7.

¹⁵Rebecca Larson's *Daughters of Light* illustrates that the Quaker faith was unique because it allowed Quaker women to dedicate their lives to becoming active and devout servants of God. Quaker women did not have to become wives and mothers and could choose to become travelling ministers, though Larson admits some women did chose both. Larson outlines how this was seen as socially acceptable by the Quaker community and contends, "Women's participation in the ministry, traditionally a masculine prerogative, sprang from Quaker belief in both genders' capacity to be guided by the Holy Spirit in inspired preaching" (4). Larson articulates better than most the notion that Quakers believed God could call on men and women indiscriminately to spread his message. While Quakers encouraged their members to marry and wholeheartedly supported a union between two devout Friends, Larson validates the claim that travelling women preachers who did not marry were not seen as social outcasts. She concludes that while Quakers did not initiate any official change to eighteenth-century colonial law, "The Quaker community's acceptance of single, adult women who had a 'calling' beyond marriage and motherhood was its greatest modification of the legal subordination of women to men" (155). For more information, see Larson, *Daughters of Light*, 4-5 & 155.

¹⁶"Testimony from Grace Church-Street" in *Memorials Concerning Deceased Friends*, 56.

other than that of a wife and a mother. Because Philadelphia had a substantial Quaker population during this period, Wulf argues the city's "culture...provided a more expansive space for the development of positive models of femininity outside marriage."¹⁷ Clearly the Quaker community had an influence on eighteenth-century Philadelphian society. Women such as Drinker illustrate that Quaker women could, if they chose, have an active presence in their communities.

Some historians claim eighteenth-century Quaker women's presence in public political activities was acceptable because such behavior fit within the framework of their religious beliefs.¹⁸ This seems to be confirmed by the descriptions of women like Elizabeth Drinker. Historical interpretations that suggest "women who did not marry faced bleak futures as dependants in the homes" of family members and that most "public venues of responsibility were closed to such women,"¹⁹ do not apply to the Philadelphia Quakers. Elizabeth Drinker was an independent, unmarried woman during the Revolutionary era who was actively engaged in public discussions and was admired for her service.

A thorough examination of Quaker memorial books illustrates that Drinker's story is not unusual. A memorial for Sarah Morris, described as "a diligent attendant of our

¹⁷Wulf, *Not All Wives*, 2.

¹⁸Gundersen is skeptical of women's power in public politics during this period and attributes much of their participation in such activities to their identities as Christians. She contends, "While men could be overtly and explicitly political, women often fused politics with religion" (149). Gundersen claims many of women's contributions to the war effort were little more than charitable relief work, similar to what women did in their churches, and concludes that women had little power beyond that which their religion allowed. Studies by Larson and Wulf challenge this interpretation by showing how women's activities shaped colonial and Revolutionary society. Please see Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World*, 149.

¹⁹Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers*, 5. Berkin argues that there were no major changes in gender ideologies as a result of the Revolution, though she does acknowledge that the era did "lend legitimacy to new ideas about women's capacities and their proper roles" (xvii). Berkin does not address Quaker women in great detail.

religious meetings,” reveals she adopted a life of religious piety and devotion to her faith.²⁰ She lived the ideal Quaker life and was memorialized for being “rightly called to this weighty work,” or a life of preaching.²¹ Her sense of duty to her faith began when she was a girl, and she pleased her parents with her commitment to the Society of Friends. Her contemporaries also saw her “knowledge and experience” improve as she aged, leading her to become an “able gospel minister...pertinent in exhortation, clear and audible in utterance, and careful to adorn the doctrine she preached by a pious exemplary life and conversation.”²² Like Drinker, Morris visited London as part of the transatlantic connection between American and British Quakers. There she “discharged her religious duty to the edification of the churches.”²³ Even though Morris suffered from poor health towards the end of her life, she did not let her ailments hinder her travels or preaching, earning her admiration from contemporaries for her strength and faith. Far from questioning her role, her travels were celebrated and held up for others to admire. Many of her activities were confined to her church community, but she still maneuvered through secular society as a citizen and as a respected member of her city.

The Society of Friends did not limit preaching and instruction to men and unmarried women, however. Quaker memorials also celebrated married women and characterized them as “useful and active member[s] in the church.”²⁴ In a memorial

²⁰“A Testimony from the Monthly-Meeting of Philadelphia, concerning Sarah Morris” in *A Collection of Memorials Concerning Divers deceased Ministers*, 310.

²¹Ibid., 316.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., 317.

²⁴“A Testimony from the Monthly-Meeting of Philadelphia, concerning Mary Pemberton” in *A Collection of Memorials Concerning Divers deceased Ministers*, 358.

dedicated to Mary Pemberton, married to Virginia exile Israel Pemberton, her obedience to God and pious character were recognized and honored. At an early age Pemberton “experienced a growth and advancement in the life of religion” that eventually allowed her to enjoy “many years in the station of an elder and overseer.”²⁵ As an elder and an overseer, Pemberton spoke at Friends’ meetings and encouraged her Friends to put their “whole trust and confidence...in the everlasting Father.”²⁶ Her example illustrates that married Quaker women could be spiritual leaders; it was not necessary to devote their lives solely to the ministry. Pemberton balanced family life with her spiritual obligations and was remembered as a woman of “great...Christian fortitude.”²⁷ More importantly, she serves as an example that Quaker women could maneuver between their public and domestic lives with ease.

Mid-eighteenth-century Quaker women such as Drinker, Morris, and Pemberton did not view their actions as progressive or exceptional; their activities were normal for Quaker women. The foundations of their Quaker faith seem to have instilled a sense of gender equality in these and other Quakers of this period. Their equality extended beyond the bounds of their religious community, and Quaker women sometimes became involved in secular politics, as the case of the exiles’ wives shows. Historians have shown that the Society of Friends insisted on “the equality of all men and women”²⁸ and

²⁵“A Testimony from the Monthly-Meeting of Philadelphia, concerning Mary Pemberton” in *A Collection of Memorials Concerning Divers deceased Ministers*, 358.

²⁶Ibid., 360-1.

²⁷Ibid., 359.

²⁸Berkin, *First Generations*, 89.

that Quaker gender relations were governed by the principle, “in souls there is no sex.”²⁹ Few, however, have explored how this principle made the transition from the church to secular politics smoother for Quaker women. While other eighteenth-century women seem to have been at a “distinct political...disadvantage,”³⁰ Quaker women were not. Their experiences in leading Friends’ meetings and in the management of ““other affairs of the church””³¹ helped them to develop the skills necessary for success beyond the domestic realm, whether in the sacred or secular community. Eighteenth-century American Quaker women developed organizational, leadership, and business skills because they were raised to be potential church leaders.³²

Eighteenth-century American Quaker women’s identities as wives and mothers were also influenced by the Society’s foundational texts and founding members. During the mid-eighteenth century Pennsylvania Friends in particular emphasized the teachings of the Quaker founding elite, because they felt that other Friends were not adhering to Quaker principles. The leaders of this movement, referred to as the American Quaker Reformation, reinforced Quaker mores, including the responsibilities of men and women within the sect, marriage practices, and childrearing.³³ By following the teachings and

²⁹Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism*, 232.

³⁰Wulf, *Not All Wives*, 200.

³¹Dunn, “Saints and Sisters,” 599.

³²“The role of women,” <http://www.quaker.org.uk/Templates/Internal.asp?NodeID=90276>, (accessed 15 March 2007). Gundersen and Berkin have also outlined the “parallel system of meetings for [Quaker] men and women,” which allowed both sexes to make decisions important to the sect (Gundersen, 96). Gundersen characterizes the Society of Friends as the most egalitarian sect during the Revolutionary period. Berkin agrees, stating, “Quaker women and men organized themselves separately, each holding a monthly meeting that ran from a few hours to a full day;” furthermore, such meetings “were charged with basic oversight of the local community” (Berkin, 91). For more information on the parallel meeting systems, please see Berkin, *First Generations*, 91-3 and Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World*, 96.

³³See Marietta, *The Reformation of American Quakerism*, xi-xii.

practices of the sect's founding members, Pennsylvania Friends hoped to strengthen the sect and possibly recruit new men and women to increase membership.

Margaret Fell, often referred to as "The Mother of Quakerism,"³⁴ embodied everything a Quaker woman should strive to become: wife, mother, dutiful servant of the church, and companion to her husband. George Fox, founder of the Society of Friends, converted Fell around 1652, and the two married in 1669 after Fell's first husband passed away. Sources describe how, from the moment of her conversion, Fell became "a tower of strength to the new Quaker movement,"³⁵ and upon her marriage to Fox the two embarked on a "spiritual partnership."³⁶ Fell authored dozens of tracts, letters, sermons, and similar types of literature that profoundly shaped Quaker notions of femininity and masculinity. Her tracts and orations defined many of the roles and duties that modern Quakers still embrace. Although Fell passed away about a century before the Virginia exile episode, her life served as an example of what eighteenth-century Quaker women could accomplish.

Fell began the tradition of Quaker women becoming involved in secular politics.³⁷ In her brief autobiography, Fell described the travels and trials she experienced as a religious dissenter in Great Britain. She tells of the letters she sent to the King and various noblemen protesting Quaker persecution throughout Europe, her arrest and

³⁴Mary Garman et al., eds., *Hidden in Plain Sight: Quaker Women's Writings 1650-1700* (Wallingford: Pendle Hill Publications, 1996), 2.

³⁵Bacon, *Mothers of Feminism*, 15.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 17.

³⁷Dunn explains Fell and her daughter Sarah were very influential in "the formation of early women's meetings." Please see Dunn, "Saints and Sisters," 598.

confinement for refusing to violate Quaker principles by swearing an oath, and how she balanced her obligation to God with those to her husband and family.³⁸

Fell was also a familiar presence and a frequent speaker in Friends' meetings in Great Britain, establishing the precedent of women ministers. At the same time, Fell accomplished something still more significant. She crossed over into the world of secular politics in 1660, when at the age of forty-six she petitioned King Charles to recognize the Quaker faith.³⁹ Although Fell was never able to arrange "a Meeting of any sort" between the governing officials and "our Friends,"⁴⁰ she had demonstrated that the leadership skills Quaker women developed in Friends' meetings could be applied to the secular world. Fell's example also shows that non-Quakers did not believe women should participate in such affairs. Her non-Quaker contemporaries questioned the legitimacy of Fell's involvement in civil affairs, but despite such criticism Fell refused to change her bold demeanor. She was arrested and jailed several times particularly because of her outspoken criticisms of the state's failure to respond to Quaker maltreatment. Despite continued persecution, Fell never ceased to exercise the rights she and the Society of Friends' believed to be appropriate for women.

The writings of Anne Whitehead and Mary Elson, two other members of the Quaker founding elite, also shed light on the rights and responsibilities of women in the sect. Their epistles justified and encouraged women's participation in the Quaker

³⁸Margaret Fell, "A Relation of Margaret Fell, Her Birth, Life, Testimony, and Sufferings for the Lord's Everlasting Truth in her Generation, Given forth by her Self [*sic*], as followeth [*sic*], Viz." in *Hidden in Plain Sight*, ed. Mary Garman, et al., 246-51.

³⁹In Great Britain at this time, the Quaker faith was looked upon with suspicion. Margaret's autobiographical sketch describes the persecution Quakers experienced at the hands of the State in great detail. For more information, see Fell, "A Relation of Margaret Fell" in *Hidden in Plain Sight*, 246-9.

⁴⁰Fell, "A Relation of Margaret Fell" in *Hidden in Plain Sight*, 246.

meetings, which acted as a governing body for the Society of Friends. An epistle from 1680, coauthored by Whitehead and Elson, argued for the legitimacy of the Women's Meeting, which was being questioned by dissenting members and non-Quakers alike. Whitehead defended the right of women to be spiritual leaders when she proclaimed, "[A]ll are left to the Measure of Truth in them, which is one and the same in all Consciences."⁴¹ Whitehead and Elson believed God spoke to both men and women through their consciences, and that the spirit was not distinguishable by sex.

Not all Friends were convinced. Some members of the "formative generation" rejected gender equality but either allowed themselves to be convinced or left.⁴² Those who criticized the Quakers' emphasis on spiritual equality cited St. Paul's condemnation of women's spiritual leadership. While Fox and early female Friends accepted "the restrictions St. Paul laid on the women of Corinth," they concluded that joining the Society of Friends was a "spiritual regeneration" and "dismissed" St. Paul's limitations as irrelevant to Quakers.⁴³ Friends cited other Scriptural passages to support this idea such as Acts 2:17-18, which declares, "In the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh and your sons and your daughters shall prophecy...yes, on my menservants and on my maid servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit and

⁴¹Anne Whitehead and Mary Elson, "An Epistle for True Love, Unity, and Order in the Church of Christ, Against the Spirit of Discord, Disorder and Confusion, &c. Recommended to Friends in Truth, chiefly for the sake of the Weak and Unstable Minded, for Information and Encouragement in Our Christian Unity and Society, held in the Spirit of Christ, both in Faith and Practice. By two Servants of the Church, according to our Measures, Anne Whitehead, Mary Elson" in *Hidden in Plain Sight*, ed. Garman et al., 493.

⁴²Dunn, "Saints and Sisters," 598. According to Dunn, members of the Quaker community have rarely disagreed on the notion of equality of the sexes. This criticism usually came from non-Quakers.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 596. According to the Bible, St. Paul had forbidden Corinthian women from giving religious instruction.

they shall prophecy.”⁴⁴ Not only had God promised to enlighten men with the knowledge necessary to prophecy, Quakers concluded, but He also promised to bestow this gift upon His “maid servants.” The Society of Friends interpreted this passage to mean God had ordained and blessed Women’s Meetings and women’s participation in spiritual activities. Whitehead’s tract supports this conclusion, stating, “[G]ood Women of old were Helpers in the Work of the Gospel” and “the Lord blesseth [*sic*] with his Power and Presence” the Women’s meetings.⁴⁵ Since the Gospel gave women spiritual authority, Friends argued, women’s ability to act as spiritual counselors and to lead congregations was sanctioned by God. Thus, Quaker women could hold leadership positions in the church without being considered unfeminine.

Mary Elson’s “A true Information of our blessed Womens [*sic*] Meeting” endorsed many of the same principles. Her epistle explained that women Friends had been called upon to do God’s work and spread His message, herself included. She indicated, “[M]y Soul was refreshed..., and my heart tendred [*sic*], with many more of my Sisters, in the sensible feeling of that everlasting Life and Power of the Lord, and his Universal Love that had moved in his dear Servant, to call us to this Work;...and so we appointed a Meeting.”⁴⁶ According to Elson, she was not the only woman God called upon to “do this Work;” her “Sisters” had a similar sense of duty. Therefore, to please God the Quakers established a parallel meeting system that allowed men and women to play an active role in the church. Elson concluded her letter by addressing the younger women in the sect, urging them to continue the tradition of women’s service to God. She

⁴⁴Quoted in Garman et al., eds., *Hidden in Plain Sight*, xiii-xiv.

⁴⁵Whitehead and Elson, “An Epistle for True Love” in *Hidden in Plain Sight*, 493.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 498.

invited “[the] Younger women, as they come to be settled in the World amongst us” to open up their hearts so “they may be affected with the Work and Service! of our Meeting as truly as we have been.”⁴⁷ This ensured that future generations of Quaker women would continue along the path Elson and others had blazed.

Elson, Whitehead, and Fell were among the earliest and most powerful leaders of the Society of Friends; more importantly, they were women. They set the precedent of women playing an active role in the venue of the church. Quaker women continued to become respected preachers and spiritual leaders throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in Britain as well as the United States.

Elizabeth Bathurst’s “The Sayings of Women” serves as final evidence that early Quaker leaders justified women’s church leadership with Biblical evidence. Bathurst was another influential woman of the founding Quaker elite in Great Britain, and her collection, printed in 1695, was a compilation of Biblical passages that justified women’s participation as leaders of the church. In “The Sayings of Women,” one finds dozens of citations referencing the actions of influential women in the Bible. For example, the collection included the story from the first book of Samuel of Hannah, who prayed in the temple, “pouring out her Soul before the Lord” with a specific petition.⁴⁸ God heard her

⁴⁷Whitehead and Elson, “An Epistle for True Love” in *Hidden in Plain Sight*, 500.

⁴⁸Elizabeth Bathurst, “The Sayings of Women. Which were spoken upon sundry Occasions, in several Places of the Scriptures. Briefly Collected and Set together, and to shew [*sic*] how the Lord poured out his Spirit upon the whole House of Israel; not only on the Male, but also on the Female; and made them Stewards of the manifold Gifts of his Grace; and as those who knew they must give an account of their Stewardship to the Lord” in *Hidden in Plain Sight*, ed. Garman et al., 432. There are approximately thirty-four Biblical references in this collection.

plea and granted her request. To celebrate, “she made a fervent and large Speech, in magnifying and exalting the Lord.”⁴⁹

The collection also included the story Tekoah, from the second book of Samuel, who spoke directly to King David on behalf of the King’s son Absalom. Absalom had been banished from the kingdom for disloyalty, and Tekoah approached the King to request Absalom be permitted to return. Bathurst described, “[Y]ea, she communed with him” until “she convinced him of the Matter she had to say unto him.”⁵⁰ Tekoah’s persistence convinced King David to permit some of his banished subjects to return, which Bathurst interpreted as a victory for Tekoah.

The stories in this collection have several common elements. First, they included descriptions of women who approached God or a powerful secular leader with the goal of achieving a greater good. They did not need a man to accompany them or to speak on their behalf. What’s more, the women achieved the results they desired, confirming women could be independent, powerful, and influential speakers. The collection concluded by summarizing that “Male and Female are made one in Christ Jesus, so Women received an Office in the Truth as well as Men...so shall they be made rulers over much.”⁵¹ While we cannot say for certain that eighteenth-century Philadelphia Quakers read this collection or Bathurst’s other texts, it is likely they were influenced by her ideas.⁵² As mid-eighteenth-century Philadelphia Quakers strove to reform their

⁴⁹Bathurst, “The Sayings of Women” in *Hidden in Plain Sight*, 432.

⁵⁰Ibid., 433.

⁵¹Ibid., 440.

⁵²The author was unable to find information to confirm whether this collection was reprinted in Philadelphia. Marietta shows there was a strong transatlantic connection between Pennsylvania and British Quakers, and he demonstrates Quaker reformers emphasized the ideas and teachings of the Quaker

church, they turned to many basic tenets of their faith, including the notion of spiritual gender equality.⁵³

Early Quaker texts shed light on Quaker women's roles in the sect, as many of these sources celebrated Quaker women's leadership and emphasized their ability to enjoy an active role in the church. Friends found support for such ideas in the Bible and turned to the Scripture to justify their claims. As suggested in Chapter Three, Quaker men and women had separate, gendered responsibilities in their households; however, a woman's identity as a Quaker woman—as opposed to a wife and mother—exposed her to leadership roles and responsibilities beyond her household. Certainly a Quaker woman could be an active leader in her church, which at times encouraged them to emerge as activists in the secular world as well. And in the case of the wives of the Philadelphia Quaker exiles, that is precisely what happened.

None have thoroughly examined the exiles' wives political activism. Historians have shown some interest in the husbands' stories, because the exile episode was a politically charged incident involving men who were supposedly uninvolved with politics.⁵⁴ The wives' and mothers' stories, however, are just as compelling and deserve a closer look. Historians have argued that women played an important role in the politics of the American Revolution, while others remain skeptical. Most who have explored women's activities during the war find that women's contributions were accepted as gender-appropriate behaviors and that the women's activities did not extend much

founding elite. We can conclude that even if Philadelphia Quakers did not have access to Bathurst's collection, they did have access to her ideas.

⁵³Marietta, *The Reformation of American Quakerism*, 29.

⁵⁴Marietta's *The Reformation of American Quakerism* contends that by the mid-eighteenth century, Pennsylvania Quakers had little to no involvement in secular politics. Instead, they focused on reforming their church.

beyond small-scale activism and relief work.⁵⁵ Even fewer have examined Quaker women through the lens of the American Revolution. Karin Wulf explores Quaker women's involvement in religious and secular politics during the colonial period, but acknowledges that by the mid-eighteenth century, when the Quaker community officially withdrew from involvement in secular politics, "women's access to public, political action was closing."⁵⁶

This chapter analyzes the actions of the exiles wives and suggests a modification of prevailing interpretations by arguing that Quaker women engaged in revolutionary-era secular politics on behalf of their husbands and their families. Building upon the foundation of their faith, the women confronted secular leaders and demanded their husbands be released. The framework of their religion encouraged them to make a successful transition from the confines of their homes to a more public, political setting.

On January 1, 1777 Sarah Logan Fisher recorded in her diary that she had spent the evening with her husband, Thomas, discussing a newspaper article. Although this sounds rather uneventful, a closer look at the details of this evening reveals something significant: "After supper my Tommy read me a paper called the American Crisis, a most violent, seditious, treasonable paper, [written] purposely to inflame the minds of the people & spirit them on to rebellion, calling the King a sottish [*sic*], stupid, stubborn, worthless, brutish man."⁵⁷ This is the bulk of the entry for that day, and though it is not lengthy the language is suggestive. First, the fact that Thomas and Sarah together read

⁵⁵For instance, see Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World*, 149-53. She claims the "political mobilization" of women that began during the Revolution did not reach its full potential until after the war. Norton also explores small-scale activism of women through boycotts, spinning bees, etc. See Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 156-70

⁵⁶Wulf, *Not All Wives*, 200.

⁵⁷Fisher, "January 1, 1777" in "A Diary of Trifling Occurrences," 420.

and discussed a politically charged newspaper indicates the intellectual companionship between this particular Quaker husband and wife. Contrary to interpretations that argue women were closed off from the political world during the Revolution, Fisher's diary suggests that some women, at least, were a part of that world.

This entry also illustrates Fisher's knowledge of the secular politics of her time. Not only did she demonstrate political awareness, but the tone of the entry indicates that Fisher had strong political opinions. Since her comments were so fiery and full of passion, it seems unlikely that these expressions were limited to her diary or that Sarah sat in silence as Thomas read aloud. This in turn suggests Fisher expressed her political opinions and dissatisfactions to her husband regularly; perhaps she also shared her views with family and friends.⁵⁸

Indeed, politics appears to have been a frequent topic of discussion between the Fishers. Two days later Fisher recorded, "My Tommy returned in the evening & we sup'd [*sic*] together & were agreeably entertained in reading a York newspaper."⁵⁹ On February 25 of that year Fisher noted, "Tommy showed me a paper which was taken from the York newspaper containing some excellent remarks on Washington's proclamation."⁶⁰ It is reasonable to assume that Fisher did not record every political discussion she and her "Tommy" enjoyed, though there are many references to such exchanges. This suggests that shared political beliefs formed a bond between the two.

⁵⁸Fisher was also an active presence within her church community. In 1776, particularly the months immediately before Thomas' arrest and exile, Fisher mentioned almost daily that she attended at least one Quaker meeting. Many days Fisher recorded that she was present at multiple meetings. For instance, please see the entries for December 8, 22, and 29, January 8, and 22, April 13, 16, and 27, etc. These select entries are evidence that Fisher was a regular participant in Quaker meetings.

⁵⁹Fisher, "January 3, 1777" in "A Diary of Trifling Occurrences," 420.

⁶⁰Fisher, "February 25, 1777" in "A Diary of Trifling Occurrences," 429.

Moreover, other diary entries discussed intelligence Fisher gathered from visitors and other Friends. Fisher was clearly an active participant in the critical politics of her era, and she closely monitored the world beyond her religious community. Though she had yet to set foot in the city to engage in a protest or attend a patriotic speech, the moment Fisher began to read, discuss, and record in her diary contemporary political events, she became a participant in secular politics. What's more, her husband encouraged her passion for politics and, one might assume from their many discussions, enjoyed sharing her interest.

The moment Thomas “was torn” from Sarah “by the hands of violent cruel men”⁶¹ she changed in many ways. In addition to feeling overwhelmed by sorrow, Fisher’s political views became bolder and her interest in politics increased, likely because her husband’s arrest meant she and her family had become directly involved with the war. Although Thomas’ exile concerned few beyond their neighborhood, Sarah needed to follow the events relating to his arrest as they unfolded, and she made daily visits to her husband when he was imprisoned in the Mason’s Lodge with other soon-to-be exiles. Of particular importance, though, were Sarah’s efforts to obtain her husband’s release. On September 5, 1777, Fisher seemed impatient as she described waiting to hear from the Pennsylvania Council or the Continental Congress after Friends had made two attempts to petition the colonial governing bodies. In these remonstrance papers, local Friends criticized the arrest of Thomas Fisher and the others as unmerited and requested the immediate release of the prisoners. Neither governing body responded, but Sarah did

⁶¹Fisher, “September 13, 1777” in “‘A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,’” 447.

find some comfort in a rumor that “gave [her] a little reason to hope” her beloved would remain in the city while officials addressed the issue.⁶²

It is telling that Fisher had such strong opinions about politics, discussed them freely in her diary and with her contemporaries, and kept a close watch on the political and social developments around her. Fisher’s example also shows that one did not need to always be physically present to be an active participant in politics. While she sometimes travelled to “Stenton [*sic*]”⁶³ with her husband and visited him every day while he was confined in the Mason’s Lodge, her diary appears to have been her closest confidante. Elizabeth Drinker, Mary Pemberton, and other Quaker women went further: they crafted and delivered petitions, sent letters on behalf of the exiles, and arranged meetings with governing officials.

Phebe Pemberton, also married to an exile, was also involved in revolutionary politics.⁶⁴ A letter from her husband James, dated April 3, 1778, illustrates that Phebe was involved in the transmission secret political intelligence. The letter, written only weeks before the men were cleared of suspicion and released, opened with the usual loving remarks of a husband to his wife and with questions about family members. The purpose of the letter changed, however, by the second page. There Pemberton asked if Phebe had received the intelligence their son Phineas was charged with delivering to her and alluded to “the diary sent thee, which...I should not choose to have lost, nor too

⁶²Fisher, “September 5, 1777” in “A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,” 446.

⁶³Fisher, “March 31, 1777” in “A Diary of Trifling Occurrences,” 432. Fisher made several references to Thomas’ trips to “Stenton,” though it is not clear where this was. He visited Stenton regularly for various errands and often returned with the latest news concerning the war. Sarah recorded this news in her diary in great detail.

⁶⁴Phebe was one of four women who wrote, signed, and presented a petition on behalf of the exiles to General George Washington; see below.

freely exposed.”⁶⁵ Apparently this was James Pemberton’s personal diary, which contained information he had entrusted Phebe to guard. He pleaded with his wife, “[I]f thou hast it in possession, communicate the contents, or any part thereof with caution.”⁶⁶ In assigning such an important task to Phebe, James demonstrated great confidence in her. He relied on Phebe to act as a secretary of sorts, sending her private information and trusting her to relay it to those, but only to those, who needed to know. Because Pemberton was able to rely on his wife in this role, he was able to relay critical information about the exiles’ situation without having to censor his letters.

Pemberton’s letter also described how Phebe had become a go-between for the exiles and their wives, and articulated his pride in her for playing this role. He boasted that “most wives are referrd [*sic*] by their exiled husbands to mine for intelligence, which... [*is*] neither a compliment of regard to their wives, nor a reputation to themselves.”⁶⁷ Pemberton made references to other political affairs relevant to the exiles’ attempts at securing their release, such as “an extract from a letter which a Gentleman in Winchester lately rec’d [*sic*] from one of the Delegates in Congress at Yorktown,” and a description of how Congress seemed “to have cleared their hands” of the matter without resolution.⁶⁸ The Continental Congress was then meeting in Philadelphia, but made no attempt to encourage or draft release orders for the exiles. James’ letters to Phebe urged her political engagement, especially in regard to his confinement. He kept Phebe informed of the exiles’ situation and the governing bodies’ decisions, and she used this

⁶⁵Pemberton, “Letter from James Pemberton to His Wife,” 3 April 1778.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Ibid.

information as she organized a trip with other wives to attempt to secure the men's releases.

One final piece of evidence from this letter further clarifies James Pemberton's support for Phebe's—and other women's—involvement in politics. James described a letter sent to the exiles informing them of attempts by one "Sus. Lightfoot" to secure their release.⁶⁹ There is no evidence that any of Susanna Lightfoot's family members were among the exiled, but she felt compelled to act of their behalf. Pemberton explained to his wife, "Sus[anna] Lightfoot, from a religious concern, accompany'd [*sic*] by her husband & two other F'nds [*sic*], have lately paid a visit to the Assembly at Lancaster on our account, had an interview of an hour & was respectfully received."⁷⁰ Pemberton did not reveal the outcome of this meeting, but his description of the incident allows us to draw several conclusions. Pemberton's phrasing is telling: he did not say that Susannah Lightfoot was among those who visited a Quaker assembly in Lancaster, he wrote "*Susanna Lightfoot, accompanied by her husband.*" Apparently Susanna Lightfoot, not her unnamed husband, organized the meeting. It also seems likely that Lightfoot spoke at the meeting and pled the exiles' case, as Pemberton's letter implies. If Susanna Lightfoot had in fact spoken on behalf of the exiles and was "respectfully received," that would indicate she had used the skills she acquired as a church leader and applied those talents to the meeting *she* had organized with secular officials.

Other exiles' wives, namely Elizabeth Drinker, Susana Jones, and Mary Pleasants, also played active roles in revolutionary politics as a result of their husbands' arrests.

⁶⁹Pemberton, "Letter from James Pemberton to His Wife," 3 April 1778. "Sus." is likely the abbreviation for Susanna, as Sarah Logan Fisher and Elizabeth Drinker both made references to meeting with a Susanna Lightfoot in their diaries.

⁷⁰Ibid.

These women, along with Phebe Pemberton, organized meetings with General George Washington and various members of the Supreme Executive Council at Lancaster. They worked together to draft a petition that they personally presented to Timothy Matlack, the Executive Council's secretary. Elizabeth Drinker described much of the planning behind such events in her diary, a source that has been examined extensively by historians. While many have used Drinker's diary to research eighteenth-century medicine or to better understand the day-to-day existence of a colonial woman, the diary also sheds considerable light on Quaker women's involvement in politics.

Elizabeth Drinker was a respected leader of her Quaker community and an active participant in the Friends' Meetings. An examination of her diary for the first three months of 1778 shows that Drinker attended only one formal meeting but hosted numerous informal meetings and gatherings in her home.⁷¹ She was also busy attending meetings with secular governing officials and along with other exiles' wives drafting a petition for the release of her husband. These tasks temporarily distracted Drinker from her role as a mother and spiritual leader while she concentrated on restoring her family. Obtaining her husband's release from imprisonment seemed to occupy most of Drinker's time, especially in February and March of 1778.

Though Drinker had concerned herself with her husband Henry's arrest since the day he was detained, she began to pursue his release in early February 1778. On February 3, she mentioned a meeting with Sucky Jones, the daughter of Susana Jones and

⁷¹Between January and March of 1778, Drinker entertained several men and women Friends' in her home at informal meetings. Drinker attributes her poor attendance at the official meetings during this period to her children's various ailments and to her own injuries. On March 15 she wrote, "I have not been to meeting for several weeks past, on account of Sickness among the Children and my black Eye &c." Drinker was injured on February 27 when she collided with a stable boy in the dark, which bruised her eye, caused her cheek to swell, and gave her headaches. For more information, see *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, Vol. I, ed. Crane (1991), 286-9. Examples of the gatherings she hosted in her home can be found in the entries for January 3, 4, 6, and 17, February 10, 17, and 20, and March 5.

exile Owen Jones. Drinker described the meeting with Sucky as follows: “[H]er mammy wanted to speak with me; she intends to go before long to G. Washington...; she hinted as if she would like me to go with her.”⁷² Drinker had her doubts but on March 25 she decided with “PP. and MP.” that she would help “draw up something [*sic*] to present to those who shall acknowledge our dear Friends as their prisoners.”⁷³ The women’s intention was to deliver the petition personally to the governing officials charged with holding their husbands, “tho [*sic*] we do not yet say so.”⁷⁴ This last statement suggests that Drinker may have wondered if their actions would be acceptable to her friends, religious community, or even her husband, but whatever the cause of the women’s hesitation, they made up their minds to go.

Meeting with General Washington and petitioning the Pennsylvania Council members were daunting prospects, but Drinker had considerable related experience. She was a frequent speaker at Quaker meetings, had likely helped in the maintenance of the women’s records, had many political conversations with other Friends during her husband Henry’s confinement, and knew that meeting with these powerful men was her best chance at bringing Henry home.

On March 31, Drinker met with Mary Pleasants to review the “paper drawn up to send or take to Congress.”⁷⁵ The women were given the opportunity to review a petition

⁷²Drinker, “February 3, 1778” in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Crane (1994), 71-2.

⁷³Drinker, “March 25, 1778” in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Crane (1994), 73.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Here Drinker is referring to the petition, but it is not clear if the women ever actually met with the Congress. Drinker, “March 31, 1778” in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Crane (1994), 73. Some members of the SEC (Supreme Executive Council) were aware of the petition and had met with the women, but there is no explicit reference to a meeting with Congress. See Patricia Law Hatcher, “‘Entirely

written by another Friend, Nicholas Waln, which they rejected.⁷⁶ It speaks to the self-confidence of the women that Drinker and Pleasants felt free to reject a petition they found wanting, regardless of its author. There is also no indication that Waln challenged the women's decision. Instead, Drinker, Pleasants, and many of the exiles' wives met later that afternoon, where Waln read the women's version of the "Address" aloud, after which they all signed the document.⁷⁷ The women signed a final, revised version on April 2, only four days before Drinker and her Sisters left for Valley Forge to meet with General Washington.⁷⁸

On April 3, Owen Jones and Israel Morris, Quakers close to Elizabeth Drinker and the other women, made one last attempt to direct the women's trip to Valley Forge. Perhaps Jones and Morris wished to ensure the success of the group, or perhaps they were unsure whether the women were ready for a meeting with high level officials. Whatever the men's motives, Jones met with Drinker and the other women and explained that he and Israel wanted them to accept Israel Morris as an escort on the trip. Far from feeling relieved by the men's offer to take the lead, Drinker and the other women were offended by the suggestion, and agreed only to permit Morris to tag along provided "he would come in our terms."⁷⁹

Morris quickly apologized, explaining that he had the interests of the exiles in mind, but Drinker and Pleasants "spoke freely to him" and advised him they "could not

an act of our own': Women's Petition for Quaker Prisoners, 1778," *The Pennsylvania Genealogical Magazine* 42, no. 2 (2001): 152-6 for a detailed description of the women's meetings.

⁷⁶Drinker, "March 31, 1778" in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Crane (1994), 73.

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Drinker, "April 2, 1778" in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, Vol. I, ed. Crane (1991), 295.

⁷⁹Drinker, "April 3, 1778" in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, Vol. I, ed. Crane (1991), 295.

agree to unite with him in the busyness [*sic*].”⁸⁰ After much deliberation, Drinker noted that the group agreed Morris would accompany the women on the condition that he offered advice only “when we asked.”⁸¹ Morris seemed satisfied with the agreement, though he “hinted that he thought it necessary that he should appear with [the women] before Congress,” which Drinker and Pleasants “by no means consented to.”⁸²

The back-and-forth discussion over whether or not Drinker and the other women should take the lead in their meeting with the secular officials reveals the women’s confidence in their ability to persuade officials to act on their husbands’ behalf. Jones and Morris were uncomfortable with the idea of the women travelling to Valley Forge without a male escort out of a concern that the women might not be prepared for such important meetings. Jones and Morris may have had faith in the women’s abilities to argue their point and make a favorable impression, but they may also have worried that non-Quakers would question the appropriateness of what the women were doing. Whatever the men’s motives, Drinker and the others would have none of it. The women were confident in their ability to meet with the officials and to persuade them to release their beloved husbands. They did not need Israel Morris or any other man to protect them or speak for them.

At one-thirty in the afternoon on April 6, Drinker, Pleasants, Pemberton, and Jones arrived at Valley Forge, the petition and a letter in hand.⁸³ Despite the women’s

⁸⁰Drinker, “April 3, 1778” in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, Vol. I, ed. Crane (1991), 295.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Drinker, “April 6, 1778” in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Crane (1994), 74-5. According to Patricia Law Hatcher, Mary Pemberton, wife of exile Israel Pemberton (not to be confused with the Israel that accompanied the wives to Valley Forge), sent a letter with Drinker and the others. She was in

excitement over the prospect of securing their husbands' release, the much-anticipated meeting with General Washington turned out to be a rather uneventful affair. The Quakers were entertained by Martha Washington for a short time, then "G.W. came and discoarsd [*sic*] with us freely, but not so long as we could have wish'd [*sic*]." ⁸⁴ The women were invited to dine with General and Mrs. Washington and his staff, after which the women were sent "with the General Wife up to her Chamber," where they "saw no more of him." ⁸⁵ Historians have interpreted Washington's inaction as a snub; however, when he sent the women off with his wife and claimed he had no authority in the matter, he was being truthful. ⁸⁶ As a token of generosity, he wrote the women a pass to ensure they would travel unmolested to Lancaster, where they would meet with other governing officials and continue the fight for the release of their husbands. He also handed Israel Morris a letter to give to Thomas Wharton, the president of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania, which was one of the governing bodies involved with this whole mess. ⁸⁷ Though this was a generous gesture, by giving the letter to Morris rather

her early seventies and was too frail for the journey. The letter, like the petition, was her personal plea to George Washington. Pemberton hoped Washington would grant a protection order for supply wagons the exiles' families wanted to send to relieve the sick and destitute exiles. Washington did not believe prisoners of war deserved such a privilege, though he forwarded her concerns to the proper authority. The text of the letter is included in Hatcher, "Entirely an act of our own," 147.

⁸⁴Drinker, "April 6, 1778" in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Crane (1994), 75.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Linda Kerber argues that the act of sending the women off with his wife after the dinner was interpreted as offensive by Drinker and her companions. She maintains, "[T]he custom of separating the ladies from the gentlemen was carefully used by Washington to limit his dealings with the importunate Quaker women" (97). Apparently, Washington was put off by the women's forceful characters. See Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 96-7. Although the women were disappointed with Washington's inaction and insulted that he did not seem to take them seriously, Washington really had no jurisdiction in the matter.

⁸⁷Drinker, "April 6, 1778" in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, Vol. I, ed. Crane (1991), 297. The contents of this letter are unclear, but it likely contained a recommendation that Wharton take a look at the exiles' situation and see what could do to help.

than Drinker, Washington possibly demonstrated his assumption that politics was men's business.

Despite the alleged snub, the women continued to Lancaster and met with members of the Supreme Executive Council with the hope that their families would eventually be restored. On April 9, 1778 they met with Thomas Wharton, the president of the Executive Council, but they only "had about ½ hour conversation with him" that proved to be "not very satisfactory."⁸⁸ On April 10 the women "were waited upon by T[imothy] Matlack" and three other council members, and at this meeting Matlack asked for their petition. They heard from Matlack the next day, April 11, when he informed Susana Jones that he had nothing new to report. Frustrated by these exchanges, Drinker continued to express her displeasure with the Council's inaction until April 20, when she declared the women received letters from their husbands indicating "they would be with us...the latter end of this week."⁸⁹ The women were so delighted that they "read [their] letters over and over."⁹⁰ They were reunited with their husbands on April 25, 1778, seven months after the men had been exiled.

The language of the petition the women gave to Matlack reveals much about their sense of self. In the petition, the women crafted a two-prong defense. First, they framed the petition in terms of religion. In other words, they drew upon an important part of their identity to persuade Congress to do what they asked. Declaring, "Bound by the strongest ties of natural affection, sympathy, and regard," the women appealed to the

⁸⁸Drinker, "April 9, 1778" in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, Vol. I, ed. Crane (1991), 298.

⁸⁹Drinker, "April 20, 1778" in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, Vol. I, ed. Crane (1991), 301. Drinker and the others had not yet returned to Philadelphia. Several Friends in and around Lancaster opened their homes to the women over this two week period.

⁹⁰Ibid.

delegates' consciences, requesting them to "suffer Christian charity and compassion so far to prevail in your minds as to take off the bonds of those innocent and oppressed Friends."⁹¹ They ended this part of the petition with one final plea: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."⁹²

Not only was the petition written with strong Christian undertones, but it sheds light on a second part of the authors' sense of self. The exiles' wives presented themselves in the petition in their primary role as "afflicted and sorrowful wives, parents, and near connections."⁹³ Next, they attempted to arouse official sympathy for their situation by appealing to emotions: "[N]o doubt many of you have Wives and tender children and must know that in the time of trial and distress none are so proper to alleviate & bear apart of the Burthen as their affectionate Husbands."⁹⁴ The women were also firm in their proclamation that their "Dear friends are Clear and Innocent of the charges alleged against them," and their petition balanced appeals to professionalism and emotion with determination.⁹⁵

⁹¹Susana Jones, Phebe Pemberton, Elizabeth Drinker, et al., "To the Congress, Board of War, President and Council, and Assembly of Pennsylvania" in "'Entirely an act of our own'," ed. Hatcher, 147.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Susana Jones, Phebe Pemberton, Elizabeth Drinker, et al., "A Parcel of afflicted and sorrowful Quakers to Congress" in "'Entirely an act of our own'," ed. Hatcher, 147.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Gundersen would argue that the language of this petition parallels that of other women's petitions during the Revolution. She insists women often "petitioned those in authority for help," though she admits only five percent "of petitions sent to Congress came from women." (159). Furthermore, women's petitions were often requests for widow's pensions. Such petitions "emphasized [women's]...dependency and poverty while using an emotional, pleading tone depreciating their status as women." Norton would argue that a sense of helplessness evident in the women's petition is not unique, as female self-perceptions during this period led most women to feel as though "they were incapable of helping themselves" in their husbands' absences (405-6). Please see Gundersen, *To Be Useful to the World*, 159-60 and Mary Beth Norton, "Eighteenth-Century American Women in Peace and War: The Case of the Loyalists," *William and Mary Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (1976): 405-7 for more information. The exiles' wives petition does support these interpretations; however, the women were unique because of their

Writing, signing, and hand-delivering a petition to Congress was a remarkable task for anyone in the late eighteenth-century, but especially for women. Historian Patricia Law Hatcher notes, “Political actions by women were extremely rare” during this period.⁹⁶ The actions of Drinker and the others went well beyond other forms of women’s political activism, such as meeting in groups to make quilts or organizing and distributing relief to widows and children. Their message to General Washington, Congress, and the Supreme Executive Council was simple: they wanted the immediate release of their “affectionate Husbands.”⁹⁷ Just as Margaret Fell had petitioned Charles of England in 1660 on behalf of persecuted Quakers, so too did Drinker and the other wives approach and petition their society’s secular leaders to demand action. Moreover, their society was in the process of redefining the roles and responsibilities of women.⁹⁸ Perhaps this is why they were successful. With a petition, a few additional meetings, and persistence, the women had accomplished the one thing they set out to accomplish—they returned to Philadelphia with their husbands on April 30, 1778.⁹⁹

This chapter illustrates that Quaker women’s roles and their political activism were closely linked. It has shown that the exiles’ wives only became active in secular

Quaker background. Their identity as Quakers allowed them to write a petition and to present it to a group of officials; these were actions not far removed from their experiences in the sect and the Women’s Meetings. Though these women were distressed as a result of their husbands’ absence, it seems more likely that the pleading, desperate tone of the petition was a rhetorical strategy employed in the interest of gaining favor for their cause.

⁹⁶Hatcher, “‘Entirely an act of our own’,” 145.

⁹⁷Jones, Pemberton, Drinker, et al., “A Parcel of afflicted & sorrowful Quakers” in “‘Entirely an act of our own’,” 146.

⁹⁸See Chapter Two for more information.

⁹⁹Their meetings with the SEC members expedited the release process, but by early April the SEC had become fed up with the incident and the Congress had washed their hands of the exiles. This, along with the wives’ persistence, led the SEC to officially order the men’s release on April 21, 1778. Please see Hatcher, “‘Entirely an act of our own’,” 156.

politics when their families were in danger. The women were fueled by their desire to preserve their families, protect their children, and bring their husbands home. Even though this situation required them to step out of their households and become more than wives and mothers, everything they did—writing the petition, monitoring political affairs, and organizing meetings with secular officials—was appropriate for Quaker women. Their activities fit their religious duty as wives and mothers, and the women and their church community did not interpret their activities as unfeminine. The foundations of their faith gave them the skills needed to be successful in their attempts to persuade the Supreme Executive Council and the Congress to release the men. Quaker women's experiences as leaders in their church could and did cross over into secular politics.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In March of 1778, the Pennsylvania Council and the Continental Congress decided that neither body had either the authority or any reason to prolong the exiles' confinement in Virginia. The Philadelphia Quaker exiles' continued imprisonment was unnecessary because the men were not guilty of any criminal activity "inimical to the cause of America."¹ One source indicates that their "lenient confinement" ended once the "sympathy for the exiles persuaded the Supreme Executive Council to return...and release them" to Pennsylvania.² This source does not indicate who felt sympathetic for the men, and nowhere does the statement recognize the role of the wives of the exiles' in bringing about the release of their husbands. One may conclude the women's petition persuaded the Pennsylvania Council and the Congress to release the men to their "afflicted and sorrowful wives, parents, and near connexions [*sic*]"³ and that the petition was likely the source of such sympathies.

The decision to release the Virginia exiles was influenced by the fact that between February and March 1778, "a veritable stream of Quakers and prisoners' wives visited Lancaster and York to plead" for the release of the exiles.⁴ This statement refers to the meetings between the wives and the Supreme Executive Council members in early April.

¹Fisher, "September 7, 1777" in "A Diary of Trifling Occurrences," 446.

²"Quakers" in *A Companion to the American Revolution*, ed. Jack P. Greene and J.R. Pole (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 243.

³Jones, Pemberton, Drinker, et al., "To the Congress, Board of War, President and Council, and Assembly of Pennsylvania" in "Entirely an act of our own," 147.

⁴Anderson, "Thomas Wharton," 444.

After General Washington informed the exiles' wives that he could do nothing for them, the women met with other Friends and traveled to Lancaster and York, where they continued to plead for their cause. As Chapter Four described, Elizabeth Drinker and other women had planned to take action as early as February 3, 1778, more than two months before the men were released. These meetings, coupled with the understanding of the Executive Council and the Continental Congress that the men posed no threat, prompted the release of the exiles.

Elizabeth Drinker described the long-awaited return of her husband as an event to be celebrated by the entire Philadelphia Quaker community. She and Henry were reunited in Lancaster on April 25, 1778, where she noted her husband was “much hartier [*sic*] than expected” and appeared to be “fat and well,” and the group arrived in Philadelphia five days later.⁵ Families and friends were anxiously awaiting their return, and on April 30, 1778, Drinker described the celebration:

[The exiles] were wellcom'd [*sic*] by many before, and on our entrence [*sic*] into the City-where we arrived about 11 o'clock, and found our dear Families well, for which favour [*sic*] and Blessing and the restoration of my dear Husband, may I ever be thankful-We have had such a number of our Friends to see us this day, that it is not in my power to enumerate them.⁶

Sarah Logan Fisher experienced similar feelings of joy, though she did not express her relief until one month after her husband returned from exile. Undoubtedly, she spent that month becoming reacquainted with her “Tommy.” In May, Fisher recorded, “[D]ear banished Friends were restored to their families & honorably discharged,” and explained, “My beloved husband returned to his welcome home...with health of body & peace of

⁵Drinker, “April 25, 1778” in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, Vol. I, ed. Crane (1991), 302.

⁶Drinker, “April 30, 1778” in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Crane (1994), 76.

mind, which unspeakable favor I earnestly wish I may ever keep in grateful remembrance.⁷ Fisher and Drinker were relieved to have their husbands home. Their experiences as protectors and providers in a time of war, complicated by the task of reuniting their families, had been exhausting.

The actions of the Quaker women suggest much about the connection between their religion and their political activism. It was part of their duty as Quaker women to be good wives and mothers with a deep sense of obligation to their husbands and children. While a woman need not be a Quaker to feel this way, the Society of Friends explicitly tied a woman's devotion to her husband and her family to her devotion to God.⁸ Viewing their primary duties as helpsmeet and mothers, the wives were duty-bound to step up and preserve their families when circumstances require they do so.

The fluidity of Quaker gender roles and the overlapping duties of husbands and wives, and fathers and mothers, enabled them to juggle effectively the roles of mother, father, protector, and provider. Elizabeth Drinker's husband involved her in his business before the exile, and because of this experience Drinker was able to assume his affairs and provide for her family in his absence. Sarah Logan Fisher's diary indicated she and Thomas had often discussed politics and read political newspapers, and her interest in politics grew in her husbands' absence. Evidently the women were prepared for these awful circumstances and possessed the skills needed to support their families and become political activists for their husbands.

The women's Quaker backgrounds and the principle of spiritual gender equality are also key to understanding this incident. Drinker, Pemberton, Pleasants, and Jones,

⁷Fisher, "May 29, 1778" in "A Diary of Trifling Occurrences," 462.

⁸See Frost, *The Quaker Family in Colonial America*, 151-2 & 162-3.

drew upon their experiences as Quakers when charged with crafting and delivering the Congressional petition. Not only did they use the organizational and leadership skills they had honed in the Women's Meetings, they also used their experiences as spiritual leaders to arrange and conduct meetings with General George Washington and members of the Pennsylvania Supreme Executive Council. Even though some of their male peers recommend Friend Israel Morris act on their behalf, the women refused, confident in their ability to persuade the governing officials to release their husbands. What's more, when it seemed they were unsuccessful in their meeting with Washington, the women did not give up and go home but met with the Supreme Executive Council. The Quaker principle of spiritual equality gave the exiles' wives a unique perspective, and they did not question the appropriateness of their actions.

This thesis has argued that Quaker women's and men's roles were fluid, and suggests that the foundations of the Quaker faith shaped women's religious and secular activities in important ways. Unlike other studies, which focus on how Quaker ideals of gender equality influenced the nineteenth-century American women's rights movements, this thesis suggests the wives were not fighting to improve their status as women. Instead, they hoped to restore their families.

In February of 1778, Elizabeth Drinker reflected on her political activity and indicated she was fueled by the idea that "it might be in my power to do something for my Dear husband."⁹ This says much about her—and the other women's—motives. Their sense of self reassured them that this is what they were expected to do. Drinker, and certainly the other wives, "thought of herself first and foremost as a wife and mother,

⁹Drinker, "February 7, 1778" in *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, ed. Crane (1994), 72.

and her commitment to her family was total.”¹⁰ Perhaps this is why discussions of secular activism disappear from their diaries after their families were restored. Even though Drinker and Fisher continued to record their political thoughts, there is no evidence to suggest they “pressed for political rights.”¹¹ Happy being wives and mothers, Drinker, Fisher, and the other women were satisfied with the restoration of their families and the stability that came with it. Crisis resolved, the exiles and their families reverted to their pre-war lives.

In sum, eighteenth-century Quaker women lived in a world of multiple and conflicting responsibilities. If married, they viewed themselves primarily as wives and mothers, but they were not limited to such choices. A Quaker woman who did marry and chose to adopt the traditional model of domesticity still enjoyed considerable equality with her husband and could be a leader in her church community. When circumstances required Quaker women to exert their leadership skills in their civil community, they were able to do so effectively. As the analysis of the exile narratives reveals, Quaker women’s roles were flexible and their political identities were complex.

¹⁰ Elaine Forman Crane, “The World of Elizabeth Drinker,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 107, no. 1 (1983): 8.

¹¹Ibid.

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