

A Failed Peace: The Friendly Association and the Pennsylvania Backcountry during the Seven Years' War

Scholars interested in the complex, violent, and ultimately tragic relations between native peoples and colonists in eighteenth-century America could do worse than to examine the Friendly Association Papers at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.¹ The Friendly Association was a Quaker organization dedicated to ending Indian attacks on Pennsylvania's frontier by addressing native grievances over the loss of Indian lands to colonization. The association, which operated from 1755 to 1764, was supported by wealthy Philadelphia Quakers, most notably Israel Pemberton. The documents found in the Friendly Association collection reflect the myriad and conflicting responses of Friends, settlers, government officials, and the region's native inhabitants to the violence that engulfed Pennsylvania's backcountry during the Seven Years' War.²

The Friendly Association occupied a unique space at the intersection of Quaker idealism and backcountry violence. The organization emerged as part of a broader shake-up within Pennsylvania Quakerism precipitated by the war and the gradual decline of Quaker influence in provincial government. Consequently, Quaker reformers looked to Indian philanthropy as a means by which to reassert their influence in the colony. From 1755 to 1758, the Friendly Association took part in the government's treaty negotiations with warring Lenape and Ohio Valley Indians. Pemberton and the Friendly Association failed to stop the war—Indian diplomatic maneuvering and the British conquest of Fort Duquesne accomplished that.³ Settlers cast the Quakers as pacifist Indian sympathizers and

¹ The full name of the organization is "Friendly Association for Regaining and Preserving Peace with the Indians by Pacific Measures." Its papers are located in box 18, ser. 7, Cox-Parrish-Wharton Papers (Collection 154), Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Cited hereafter as Friendly Association Papers.

² My summary draws from Jack Marietta, *The Reformation of American Quakerism, 1748–1783* (Philadelphia, 1984), and Kevin Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost: The Paxton Boys and the Destruction of William Penn's Holy Experiment* (New York, 2009).

³ See Michael McConnell, "Peoples 'in Between': The Iroquois and the Ohio Indians, 1720–1768," in *Beyond the Covenant Chain: The Iroquois and Their Neighbors in Indian North America, 1600–1800*, ed. Daniel K. Richter and James H. Merrell (Syracuse, NY, 1987), 93–112; see also Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754–1766* (New York, 2000).

blamed them (as well as the provincial government) for native attacks on their homes and families.

Researchers will find more than just Quaker concerns in the Friendly Association Papers. The collection, though relatively modest at fourteen folders, broadly addresses the problem of race and colonial violence in Pennsylvania from multiple perspectives. William Penn, the founding Quaker proprietor, believed that compensating the Lenape for their lands would lay the foundation for peaceful coexistence between settlers and Indians. Yet Quaker and Euro-American colonization resulted in the forced westward displacement of the region's Native Americans. Colonization, in turn, led to Indian retaliations in Pennsylvania's backcountry, culminating in 1763–64 with the pan-Indian uprising known as Pontiac's War and the Paxton Boys' massacre of Conestoga Indians.

Among the Friendly Association Papers at the Historical Society is an early manuscript copy of the Paxton rioters' rationalization for "killing those Indians at Lancaster," whom they blamed for supporting "our avowed, imbibtered [Indian] Enemies." The petition castigated the Pennsylvania government for insufficiently protecting backcountry settlers and pointedly blamed Israel Pemberton and the Quakers for giving their Indian enemies "a Rod to scourge the White People."⁴ Fear and hatred of Indians—and the racial exclusion of Quakers—was essential to settlers' construction of a pan-Euro-American, interreligious notion of whiteness.⁵

Faced with the specter of uncontrollable racial violence in Pennsylvania, different Euro-American factions sought to shift blame onto one another. In one letter, Susannah Wright, a Friend, complained about the settlers' "Glaring Misrepresentations" of Pennsylvania's Quakers.⁶ In another letter, written in 1757, Virginia's Governor Loudoun chided the Pennsylvania government for "obstinately . . . carrying on Negotiations with the Indians" without due regard for the strategic and diplomatic aims of the Crown government.⁷ William Johnson, the renowned British diplomat to the Iroquois, lamented in a 1768 letter over "the Barbarity exercised on the unhappy Conestoga Indians [and] . . .

⁴ "Declaration of the Frontier Inhabitants of Pennsylvania," [1764], folder 1, Friendly Association Papers.

⁵ Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York, 2007), see esp. 122–23.

⁶ Susannah Wright to Dr. Reiger, [1764], folder 3, Friendly Association Papers.

⁷ Lord Loudoun to Governor Denny, May 5, 1757, folder 3, Friendly Association Papers.

the unjustifiable Settlements formed within their Country without the least Colour of right.”⁸

The meeting minutes of the Friendly Association from 1756 to 1764 are the most prominent part of the collection, complementing the better known, five-volume collection of Friendly Association papers at Haverford College’s Quaker and Special Collections.⁹ The minutes painstakingly detail the efforts of Friends to portray themselves as peace-makers, using the myth of Penn’s benevolent relations with the Lenape to legitimate their Indian advocacy. Though filtered through Quaker eyes, native voices occasionally emerge between the lines. At the 1756 Easton conference, for example, Quakers recorded Teedyuscung, the “King of the Delawares,” giving the Friendly Association “Liberty to search into the Foundation of [his] Complaints.”¹⁰ In the face of Pennsylvania’s strategic alliance with the Iroquois, who presumed to speak on behalf of the Lenape, Teedyuscung needed the Friendly Association as much as the Quakers needed him.¹¹

In the end, however, Teedyuscung and the Friendly Association failed in their ambitions. But the greater loss undoubtedly was suffered by the Lenape and Ohio Valley Indians, who retreated westward at the end of the war after the Pennsylvania government broke its promise to prevent throngs of settlers from crossing the Allegheny Mountains.

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⁸ William Johnson, to Joseph Galloway, Jan. 22, 1768, folder 3, Friendly Association Papers.

⁹ The collection comprises the first part of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Indian Committee Records, ca. 1745–1983, Quaker and Special Collections, Haverford College, Haverford, PA.

¹⁰ Quotation from Minutes, 1756–59, folder 10, p. 39, Friendly Association Papers.

¹¹ See Kenny, *Peaceable Kingdom Lost*, 83–111.