The Transformation of American Quakerism: Orthodox Friends, 1800-1907

ISSN 0003-4827
Copyright © 1991 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://ir.uiowa.edu/annals-of-iowa/vol51/iss1/7

Hosted by Iowa Research Online
archeologists is essential in the description and analysis of Early Historic cultural patterns and processes.

In the final chapter, George Fielder describes some of the techniques that can be used to preserve archeological sites. The paper presents no new information on Indian life in the Southeast, but it does remind the reader that nearly everything known about Mississippian cultures derives from archeological sites that are fragile and non-renewable resources. Many states are attempting to minimize site destruction by implementing comprehensive resource planning, as Fielder notes.

The editors direct this volume toward professional and amateur archeologists, but the book is also of interest to historians for two reasons. First, Mississippian cultures reached levels of sociopolitical complexity unmatched among any other native societies north of Mexico, and investigations of these complex chiefdoms can contribute to better understanding of the processes of civilizational development. Second, the era of earliest contact between Native Americans and Europeans is being subjected to intensive historical scrutiny as the Columbian Quincentenary approaches, and archeological data on precontact peoples are indispensable for comprehensive understandings of the nature and effects of contact.

This book is highly recommended as a reference to the details of Mississippian and Historic Indian cultures of the Southeast and as an interdisciplinary synthesis on the Protohistoric period in particular. Its exemplary treatments of the Protohistoric and Early Historic periods can serve as models for research on the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries in Iowa and the Midwest. The work also may encourage increased research on the intriguing connections that existed between ancient Iowa cultures and the more southerly Mississippian groups.


REVIEWED BY RICHARD E. WOOD, SEMINOLE JUNIOR COLLEGE

Quakers still contribute notably to American social, political, and religious development. Explosive growth in Africa and South America has brought worldwide membership close to three hundred thousand. Friends in the United States fall into two main categories. Widely known through the writings of its many scholars, the smaller
segment worships in silence, eschews paid ministry, promotes pacifism and humanitarian causes, and maintains a perspective sharply at odds with that of evangelical Protestantism. The larger group, located mainly from Ohio to the West Coast and in Third World countries, is far less visible because it has blended substantially with American evangelicalism.

No really adequate study of the emergence of mainstream evangelical Quakerism in America existed prior to Thomas Hamm’s brilliant analysis. Hence, important biographers of Presidents Nixon and Hoover failed to recognize the generally evangelical heritage from which these western Friends emerged. Hamm’s book adds relatively little to our understanding of eastern Quakers and their present mix of mysticism or liberal theology with denominational tradition. But it is essential for an understanding of the two significant Iowa Quaker organizations today: the Conservatives affiliated with Scattergood secondary school near West Branch, and the larger, predominantly evangelical body headquartered in Oskaloosa and loosely tied to William Penn College.

Hamm sets the stage for later changes by sketching the distinctiveness of American Quakers before mid-century. Quietistic Friends worshiped silently, shutting out worldly distractions through rigid discipline. In the first of two jolting schisms, the so-called Orthodox in the 1820s branded as heresy the extreme Inner Light mysticism of Elias Hicks. The Orthodox split again by 1854 after their inflexible traditionalists rejected the sharply evangelical beliefs of Joseph John Gurney. The larger “Gurneyite” wing remained distinctive in dress and worship until 1860, but its members joined increasingly with other Protestants in Bible distribution and reform causes.

The analysis of the 1860s and 1870s hinges on Hamm’s distinction between the moderate “renewal” movement of the 1860s and the more radical holiness “revival” that followed. Renewal leaders promoted evangelical theology and definite conversions while preserving such distinctives as worship out of silence. By 1867, however, Quakers began experiencing innovations that revivalism had brought previously to other denominations. Cadres of traveling evangelists promoted instantaneous conversions or sanctifications through preaching, emotionalism, altar calls, and congregational singing. New converts had diminished appreciation for silence and other traditions, but revivalists retained their support in the 1880s by installing paid pastors.

Hamm correctly identifies most Friends evangelists after 1870 with the instantaneous sanctification views of the National Holiness Association. His primary attribution of lost Quaker insights to the
“logic of holiness” is questionable, however. Correlation is not always causation. The innovators claimed to have recovered the evangelistic zeal of founders of Quakerism and of the New Testament church. In reviving a supposedly dying sect, they turned aggressively to evangelism and foreign missions, borrowing tactics from competitors. They justified changes in terms of Quaker duty to heed the immediate leading of the Holy Spirit. True, evangelistic zeal and “entire sanctification” terminology probably created popular misunderstanding; but at least one major advocate of the doctrine, Dougan Clark, Jr., attempted to clarify its ramifications in several books. And Quaker evangelists did teach “growth in grace” following the “second blessing” experience. Granted, numerous Friends holiness leaders and other evangelicals downplayed earlier social concerns and turned to premillennial pessimism after 1878. But economic stress and fears of the supposedly dangerous cultural values of non-Protestant urbanites, not holiness theology per se, stimulated these changes. Such progressive holiness advocates as the Salvation Army and Phineas Bresee, a Nazarene founder, sustained concerns for the social needs of the urban poor.

Hamm ably contrasts the conservative remnant of the 1880s with the redefined Quakerism of the dominant revivalists. Meanwhile a middle group, mainly business and professional people, symbolically preserved denominational identity by forbidding outward celebration of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. They also influenced the 1887 Richmond, Indiana, declaration on such issues as worship and holiness and helped create the Five Years Meeting.

A lively chapter on the rise of modernist theology and its fundamentalist opposition between 1890 and 1907 concludes the book and introduces issues that have divided both pastoral Quakers and other Protestants in the twentieth century. Hamm’s sketches of liberal leaders Rufus Jones and Elbert Russell are outstanding, as are descriptions of the shortcomings of Quaker fundamentalists, revivalists, and holiness leaders. But Hamm has imperfectly portrayed the perceptions and popular appeal of this theological right wing. Such biases skew his analytical scheme and selection of evidence, thus leaving room for further work on the topic. But his boldly argued thesis is now the starting point for understanding American orthodox Quakerism since 1800.