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WORRALL, Arthur John, 1933-  
NEW ENGLAND QUAKERISM 1656-1830.

Indiana University, Ph.D., 1969  
History, modern

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PREVIEW

NEW ENGLAND QUAKERISM 1656-1830

Arthur J.<sup>W</sup> Worrall

Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in the

Department of History

Indiana University

June 1969

This thesis is accepted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of History.

*Irene D. Neu*

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Irene D. Neu

*Richard H. Dorson*

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Richard Dorson

*H. Trevor Colbourn*

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H. Trevor Colbourn

*Edwin Cady*

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Edwin Cady

PREVIEW

## PREFACE

Students of the Society of Friends have generally ignored the history of New England Quakerism. Historians who have written on early American Quakerism have devoted most of their attention to Pennsylvania and New Jersey Friends. There have been a few exceptions, such as treatments of humanitarianism and antislavery; but no general work devoted to New England Friends has appeared. This omission has indeed been unfortunate, for in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries New England--particularly Rhode Island--was a center of Quakerism. Quakers numbered many of Rhode Island's economic and political leaders, while Friends were influential enough throughout New England to be able to obtain repeal of church taxes for Massachusetts Quakers. Friends also had an important role in the antislavery movement, first seeing to the elimination of slaveholding among members and then pressing for the emancipation of all slaves.

Merely to detail accomplishments leaves much of New England Quaker history untold, however, for after 1770 the sect began to decline numerically. Rigorous enforcement of membership rules caused this decline and brought about essentially a negative, defensive attitude among Friends.

This narrow outlook in turn led many Quakers to become concerned about the orthodoxy of their faith, and, as a consequence, to attempt to impose the credal positions of orthodox protestantism on the Society of Friends. Other Friends insisted that Quakers should avoid credal statements and continue to stress the guidance of the Inward Light of God. Thus there developed factions which resurrected doctrinal controversies as old as Quakerism itself. By the 1820's American Friends could no longer prevent their doctrinal differences from leading to open and bitter disagreement. As a result, a number of schisms, all related, followed, of which New England's was the first.

Any study of Quakerism must explore a variety of sources. Doctrinal works help explain what Quakers believed and frequently what they quarreled about, although such works are not always helpful in explaining why they quarreled. Identification of Quaker leaders and of their behavior can be found in minutes of Quaker business Meetings, and sometimes, especially in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in correspondence. Changes in church government and the effect of these changes, particularly a decline in membership, are also most likely to be found in Meeting minutes.

The obligations in preparing this study are too numerous to list in detail. Thyra Jane Foster, the archivist of the New England Yearly Meeting of Friends, patiently guided me through the Yearly Meeting archives and obtained criticism of early drafts from members of the Providence, Rhode Island, Monthly Meeting. The staffs of the John Carter Brown Library and the Rockefeller Library of Brown University, the Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, the Haverford College Library, the Newport Historical Society, the Old Dartmouth Historical Society, New Bedford, Massachusetts, and the Nantucket Historical Society opened their collections to me. Special thanks are due Sarah A. G. Smith and Henry A. Wood, II for permitting me to read family papers. Indiana University provided a fellowship and a travel grant, and the staff of the Colorado State University Library was patiently responsive to many demands on their services.

Professors Hugh Barbour, Edwin Cady, Sydney James, and Frederick Tolles read earlier versions of several chapters and made helpful comments. Professor Irene Neu read all the drafts of this thesis and offered numerous and detailed suggestions which improved this work considerably; she gave generously of her time and helped me through a number of difficult periods when it seemed as though this study would never be completed. Dean Trevor Colbourn patiently

supervised my graduate work and consented to continue as chairman of my thesis committee after leaving Indiana University. My debt to him is immense, and I cannot adequately express my thanks for his effective and kindly criticism and encouragement throughout my years as a graduate student. Finally, I must acknowledge a unique obligation to my wife Janet who has lived through draft after draft of this thesis, typing most of them, saving me from numerous stylistic pitfalls, and deferring her own research until I could complete this work.

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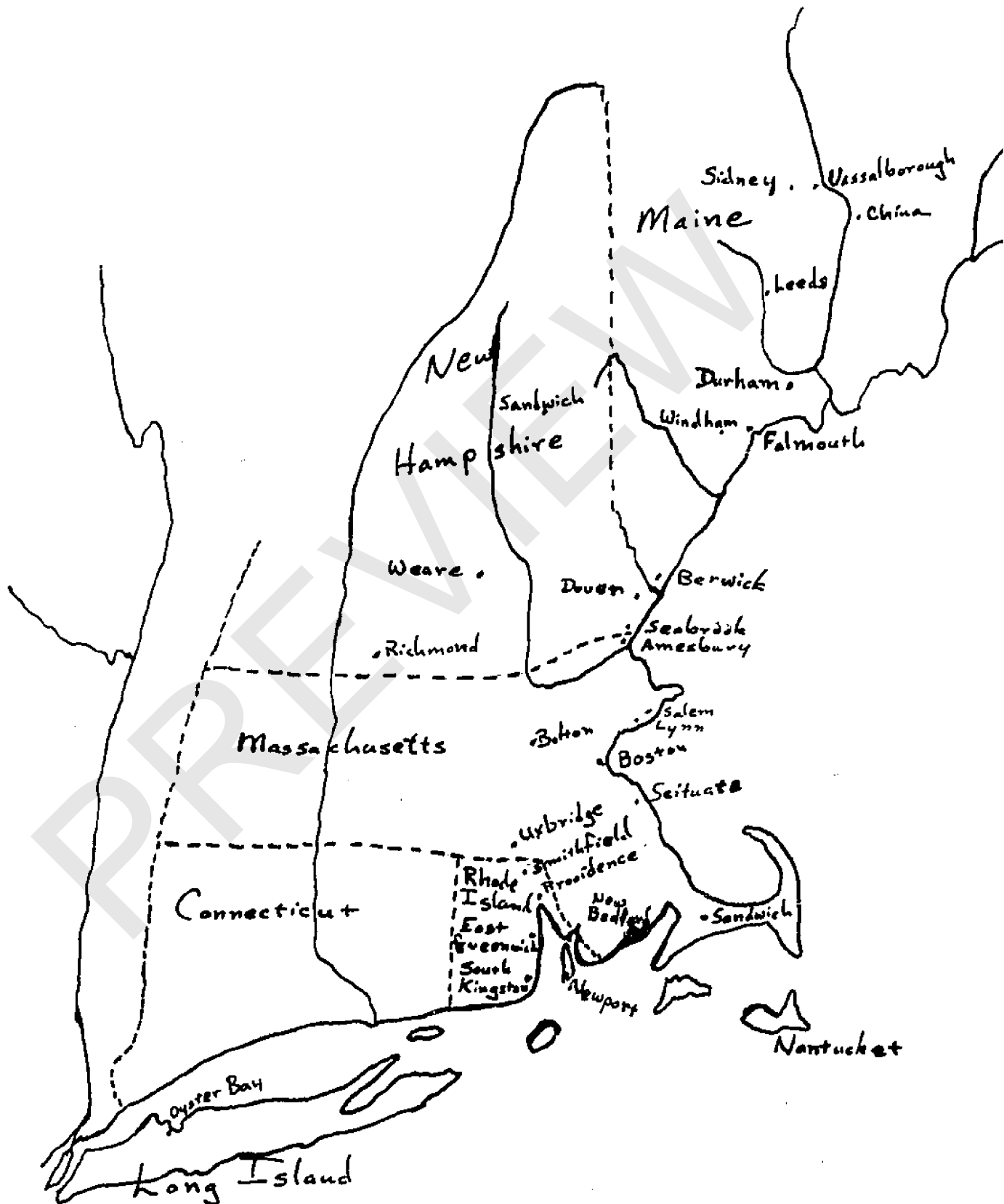
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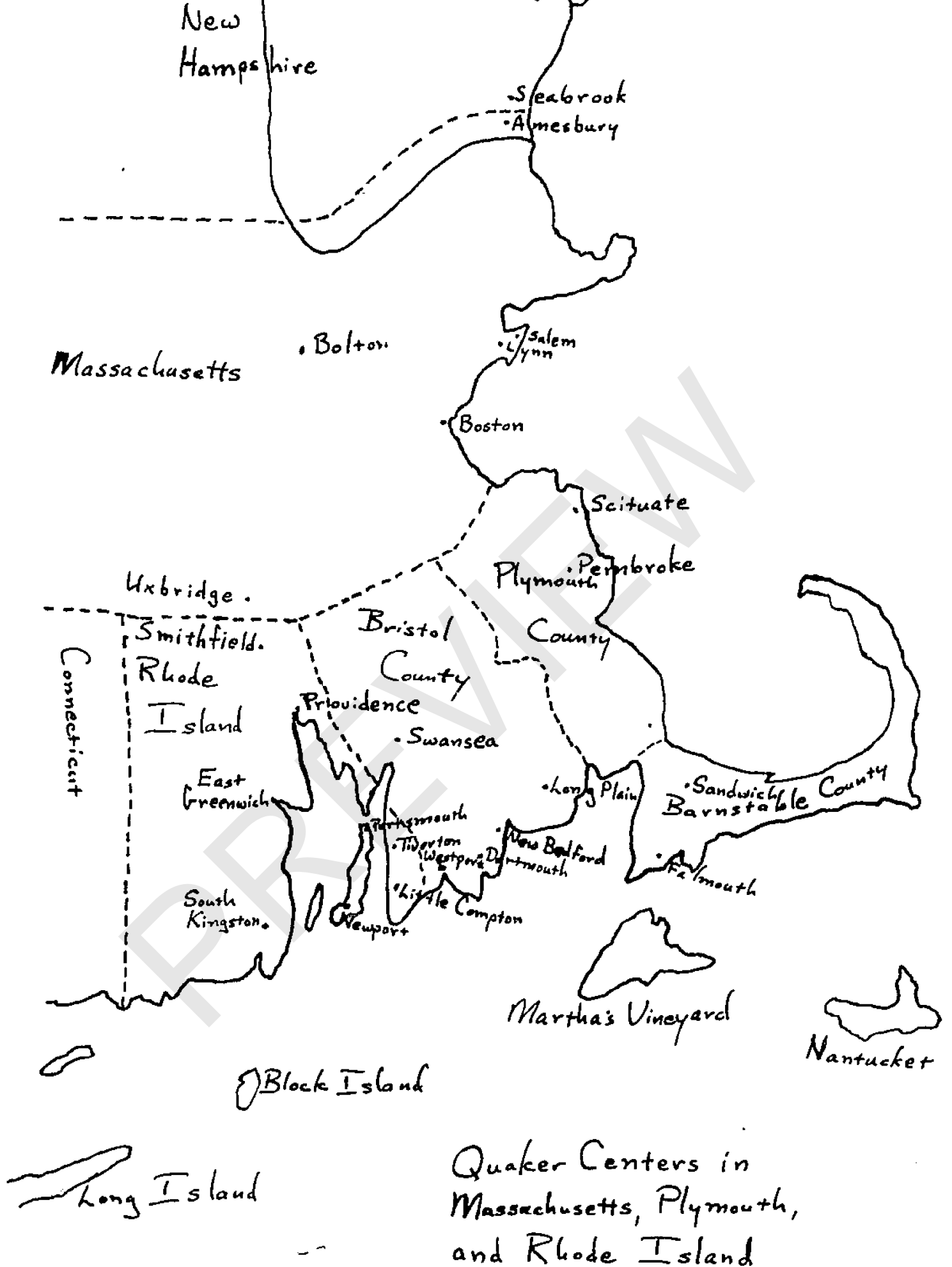
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PREVIEW



# Quaker Centers in New England





NEW ENGLAND QUAKER MEETINGS FOR BUSINESS

WITH DATES OF FOUNDING 1672-1830

New England Yearly Meeting ..... 1672

QUARTERLY MEETINGS

Rhode Island .....	1699	Smithfield .....	1801
Salem .....	1705	Vassalborough .....	1814
Sandwich .....	1706	Dover .....	1815
Falmouth .....	1794		

MONTHLY MEETINGS

Rhode Island .....	1672	Providence .....	1784
Dover .....	1672	Vassalborough .....	1787
Salem .....	1672	Durham .....	1790
Scituate .....	1672	New Bedford .....	1792
Oyster Bay .....	1672	Richmond .....	1792
(until 1695)		Nantucket Northern	
Sandwich .....	1672	District .....	1793
Dartmouth .....	1699	(until 1827)	
East Greenwich .....	1699	Weare .....	1795
Hampton (Seabrook) ...	1701	Bolton .....	1799
Nantucket .....	1708	Sidney .....	1802
Smithfield .....	1718	North Berwick .....	1802
Swansea .....	1732	Sandwich, N. H. ....	1802
South Kingston .....	1743	Windham .....	1803
Falmouth .....	1761	China .....	1813
Westport .....	1766	Leeds .....	1813
Uxbridge .....	1784		

Meeting for Sufferings ..... 1775

Select Meetings of Ministers and Elders from 1701

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PREVIEW

## CHAPTER I

### SEVENTEENTH CENTURY BEGINNINGS

Early Friends, unlike subsequent generations of Quakers, were a zealous and intolerant lot and did not care to suffer the mass of mankind to go unconverted. So they attempted to subdue the evil in the world by convincing the unregenerate of the truth of Quakerism. They followed literally George Fox's exhortation for Friends to "let all nations hear the sound by word or writing. Spare no place, spare no tongue, nor pen; but be obedient to the Lord God; go through the work; be valient for the truth upon earth; and tread and trample upon all that is contrary."<sup>1</sup>

They went beyond England in the 1650's to the European continent and unleashed a torrent of preaching--in English--upon uncomprehending princes and multitudes. In the enthusiasm of the moment two Friends reached the Ottoman Empire where they obtained an audience with the Sultan. Two others were less successful in Rome where they were denied an audience with the Pope, and authorities left them to the

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<sup>1</sup>George Fox, Journal of George Fox (2 vols.; London, 1852), I, 260.

none too tender ministrations of the Inquisition and the madhouse. Only one of them survived imprisonment.<sup>2</sup>

Some of the early Quaker missionaries met an even worse fate in New England, where they sought out the Puritan colonies in 1656 at the same time as they journeyed to other inhospitable parts of the world. By 1662 four Friends had been hung for encroaching on Massachusetts' godly experiment. While no others were executed thereafter, Massachusetts and Plymouth yielded but a grudging toleration during the balance of the seventeenth century.

## I

Quakerism originated in England about 1652. The founder or gatherer of Quakerism, George Fox, had begun to feel stirrings of a religious experience as early as 1643, and he went about the countryside in the south of England during the rest of the decade seeking persons of similar belief. Usually, however, historians have taken Fox's efforts in the North, in the counties of Westmorland, Durham, Lancashire, and Yorkshire as the beginning of organized Quakerism--specifically in 1652 when he brought

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<sup>2</sup>Hugh Barbour, The Quakers in Puritan England (New Haven, Conn., 1964), pp. 67-68.

together groups of separatists, called Seekers, in that region.<sup>3</sup>

Fox was a charismatic figure. A man of medium stature with a commanding air and steel blue eyes, his presence, to take his own words at face value, confounded opponents and converted many others. Probably more than any of the other early missionaries, Fox was responsible for the growth of Quakerism by virtually a geometrical progression in the fifties. And he found an especially receptive area in the valleys and moors of the North of England.

Large sections of England's northern counties had been long neglected by the Church. Even the Reformation left much of this area unaffected, and Puritanism had had little influence there. Consequently, the North was without strong religious attachments before Fox began his ministrations. Like several other sections where Quakerism took root, this area was economically backward, and its people poor; for over a century they had suffered from enclosures and from depredations of landlords. This combination of religious neglect and poverty was a major factor in England's remote North being open to Fox's preaching and receptive to the

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 31, 45, passim; William C. Braithwaite, The Beginnings of Quakerism (Cambridge, England, 1961), Chapter 4.

radical religious and political strains that were a part of his message.<sup>4</sup>

Fox gave a sense of meaning to the lives of these long-neglected people. His message and that of other Quakers was of a radical Puritan spiritist; that is, he emphasized the workings of God on man's spirit. To Fox, all men had a seed or an Inward Light of Christ within them. At man's election, this seed or Light could be magnified and could grow. If man sought to cultivate the Light he would be saved; if he did not, he would continue to be unregenerate. In taking this position, Fox made clear that all persons at their own election could be saved. He did not accept the prevalent Calvinist view that men were predestined to be saved or damned. Equally pernicious to Puritan clergy was Fox's belief that one did not need the preachings of a learned, salaried ministry to cultivate the Light and to be saved.

Orthodox Puritans were bound to be suspicious of the Quakers' unpaid, unlettered, self-appointed ministry as well as their suggestion that the seed of God in man was sufficient for salvation. To orthodox Puritans, Quakers had restrained God by this mode of thinking, by insisting that

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<sup>4</sup>The remaining part of this section is based on Barbour, Quakers in Puritan England, pp. 72-84, 119, Chapters 4, 5, and 6.



He had bound Himself to yield salvation to all who would accept Him. He was hardly the arbitrary and almighty Deity whom Geneva Calvinists and their lineal descendants made Him out to be. Choice for salvation or damnation, according to Friends, was not God's, it was man's, and, worst of all for the Puritans, it left decision on salvation to the individual who might easily confuse his impressions of salvation and individual perfection with the workings of the devil.

Such confusion was a very real threat to early Quakers for there were Ranters who, like the Friends, followed the leadings (that is, the guidance) of the spirit. Unlike the Friends, however, they argued that salvation led to personal perfection and an exalted state which put them beyond man's law. Such religious perfectionists were a threat to the state, and if their excesses led to anarchy, civil authorities would have to restrain them. As, like Friends, they also claimed to be following the leadings of the spirit working within them, opponents frequently confused them with Quakers.

In this expansive period, other beliefs and practices got Friends in trouble. While Quakers accepted Scripture as having a measure of authority, they stated that the Bible was not the only or the final standard for belief. They argued that there could be other revelations, for God

continued to reveal himself to man, and recent revelations might even be superior to the written word as found in the Bible. Quakers also seemed to deny the historical, Biblical Christ by saying a seed of Christ was in all men. How could Christ have died, ascended into Heaven, and still be present in man, their critics asked?

These doctrines and the drive and character of Fox appealed to the Northcountrymen and to others who were poor and untouched by any of the religious revivals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Belief in the Inward Light and rejection of clerical ministrations were attractive to people whom clergy and the church had ignored and whose religious concerns, such as they were, had of necessity been inward. Fox's message found receptive audiences who had developed doctrines strikingly similar to his before he came among them. These Northcountry Seekers received Fox as a prophet and accepted his scheme for salvation during the troubled times of the Commonwealth and Protectorate.

But in accepting the spiritist beliefs which Fox and other early Quaker missionaries helped formulate in the setting of the Puritan Revolution, these Northcountrymen passed on practices and attitudes which set their stamp on Quakerism. Refusal to use "you" in the singular was one of these customs. The traditional and egalitarian mode of speech of the backcountry North, thee and thou, were required

of Friends. The practice of refusing to remove one's hat in the presence of all men had similar egalitarian connotations. Both were quite easily made a part of Quaker practice, reinforced by the thought that the seed of Christ in all men made them equal, and that true Christians should use Biblical English, an egalitarian language.

## II

The excitement of having found a faith, and the belief that their faith was in the vanguard of the Reformation, led Friends to seek to convert all men. Men and women set out on long journeys convinced of the need to convert the world to their doctrines. In the heady first five years (1652-57) after George Fox organized the North of England, it seemed as though Friends might conquer the world, for their numbers doubled and redoubled in those years. Thereafter the rate of increase slowed as Friends were confronted by resistance in both England and the new world and by persecutions of the Stuart Restoration. However, by the year 1660 when Charles II returned from his travels, Quakers had established a foothold in New England and had started to convert substantial numbers of receptive persons, especially in Plymouth and Rhode Island.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 181-82.

New England was an inviting target for Quakers. Puritans had founded Massachusetts and her neighboring Puritan colonies of Plymouth, Connecticut, and New Haven to establish Bible Commonwealths in America. They were at once havens and models: havens for harried Puritans in England uncomfortable under William Laud's persecution and models for the English Puritans to copy once they had come to power. These New England colonies were in no sense established as centers for toleration. The exception was Rhode Island, settled by malcontents from Massachusetts.<sup>6</sup>

Trouble arose early after the founding of Massachusetts. Roger Williams had challenged the legality of the charter and both the wisdom and the Biblical justification for establishing a New Zion. For essentially religious reasons, he found forced worship repugnant, and because of his opposition had to flee to what was later Providence, Rhode Island, to escape forcible repatriation to England.<sup>7</sup>

Williams' opposition was not, however, the greatest challenge faced by Massachusetts leaders. In the 1630's a much larger number of dissidents organized around a Boston housewife, Anne Hutchinson, against the original clerical

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<sup>6</sup>Perry Miller, Errand into the Wilderness (Cambridge, Mass., 1956), pp. 4-6, Chapter 2; George D. Langdon, Jr., Pilgrim Colony: A History of New Plymouth 1620-1691 (New Haven, Conn., 1966), Chapter 5.

<sup>7</sup>Perry Miller, Roger Williams: His Contribution to the American Tradition (New York, 1953), p. 19.

and lay leadership. For a time it seemed that the Hutchinson party would control Massachusetts. But John Winthrop and the orthodox clergy won the struggle for power, and Anne Hutchinson, with most of her followers, departed to found Portsmouth, Rhode Island. Massachusetts remained safe and orthodox, and Rhode Island began its quarrelsome early history.<sup>8</sup>

The challenge was nevertheless a serious one, and New England leaders outside Rhode Island, particularly in Massachusetts, were wary of any similar threats to their experiment. There was a marked similarity in the beliefs of Anne Hutchinson and Quakers. Like Friends, the Antinomian party led by Anne Hutchinson had followed an essentially spiritist argument. Her attacks on what she thought was clerical insistence on the covenant of works stressed the necessity of one's preparing inwardly for election. Such a position was similar to later English radicals' arguments in that it gave more emphasis to the individual seeking salvation than to clerical supervision. Opponents also thought it placed the self-recognized regenerate man above the law and hence was a danger to Puritan experiment. It was primarily for

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<sup>8</sup>Emery Battis, Saints and Sectaries: Anne Hutchinson and the Antinomian Controversy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony (Chapel Hill, 1962), pp. 247-48, Chapters 9, 10.

these reasons that Massachusetts expelled Anne Hutchinson and her followers.<sup>9</sup>

Their gathering in Rhode Island in the permissive atmosphere fostered by Roger Williams meant that later when Quaker missionaries appeared, they found a colony ready for convincement (as Friends refer to conversion) to Quakerism. And this was not the only area so inclined to Quakerism. The isolated towns of Sandwich and Falmouth in southern Plymouth and Cape Cod also had groups to whom spirit mysticism was attractive. They too would prove to be fruitful areas for conversion when Friends appeared.<sup>10</sup>

So it was that New England possessed people predisposed to Quaker beliefs, ready for conversion when the first Quaker missionaries arrived. There was also potential opposition to Quakers in Massachusetts from an already challenged leadership around Boston. These men recognized the threat of Quakers as similar to that of earlier Antinomians. Their frenzied reaction to the Quaker invasion had been conditioned by an already hardened position vis-a-vis those spirit

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<sup>9</sup>James Fulton Maclear, "'The Heart of New England Rent': The Mystical Element in Early Puritan History," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XLII (1956), 643-44.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 650-51

mystics who had settled around Narrangansett Bay to the south.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, when Quakers came first to the Bay Colony in 1656, they were promptly imprisoned, then expelled. Others followed in the next two years, and it soon became clear to Massachusetts authorities that they had more on their hands than old Antinomians who would be happy to stay away once ejected and found their own colony. Indeed, the fact that Boston had already known a crisis with spiritists and was also the political, religious, and economic center of New England, made it a prime target for Quaker missionaries.<sup>12</sup>

Resistance to Quaker inroads gave Friends another reason to increase their efforts to convert residents of the Bay Colony. For in this first "prophetic" era when Quakers attempted to convert the world and fight the "Lamb's War"--as they put it--against anti-Christ, they had to challenge and overwhelm any resistance. So they returned time and again to Massachusetts where they were flogged and imprisoned, and where four of them were hung. They might have stayed in Rhode Island where they were safe, tolerated, and even welcomed by most of the population. But that would

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., passim; Rufus M. Jones, The Quakers in the American Colonies (New York, 1966), Chapter 1.

<sup>12</sup>Maclear, "Heart of New England," p. 647; Jones, American Colonies, pp. 64-65.

have been to reject the very reasons which led them to become Friends and to go to Massachusetts originally.<sup>13</sup>

There were two groups of Quakers that went to Boston in 1656. Anne Austin and Mary Fisher arrived first. Massachusetts authorities promptly imprisoned them for five weeks and then expelled them. Next came a ship bearing eight more Friends. They were similarly arrested and shipped out of the colony. With the arrival of this second group, Massachusetts authorities panicked. They decided to meet the Quaker challenge to their establishment by punitive legislation and by seeking cooperation of the United Colonies of New England.<sup>14</sup>

Massachusetts laws against Quakers sought to discourage further missionary visits by fining shipmasters and by whipping their Quaker passengers. The measures had no success in stopping the Quaker invasion, for the whipping was taken by Friends as a badge of merit. And they could invade Massachusetts from hospitable Rhode Island without endangering shipmasters. An appeal by the United Colonies of New England to Rhode Island to prevent emigration of other Quakers and to hinder those within that colony was

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<sup>13</sup>Barbour, Quakers in Puritan England, pp. 69, 217-19.

<sup>14</sup>Jones, American Colonies, pp. 28-29, 36-38.