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# Quaker Merchants and Slavery in Early National Alexandria, Virginia

The Ordeal of William Hartshorne

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In April 1816, William Hartshorne, a prominent Quaker merchant of Alexandria, Virginia, helped write a report for the Alexandria Monthly Meeting on the subjects of slavery, education, and liquor. The Society of Friends' discipline, the committee noted, "prohibits friends" from owning slaves or "from hiring slaves from those who hold them," and at present there were no members guilty of either infraction. However, the committee argued, this was not enough. "An application of the same principle" that prohibited slave hiring "renders it desirable that in those cases in which we are dependant upon others for the execution of our lawful Business we should give the preference to those who will perform the work by free men rather than . . . employ those who we may have reason to believe will use the labor of slaves." Just two years after Quaker firebrand Elias Hicks had called on Friends to boycott goods produced by slave labor, Hartshorne and his fellow committee members were suggesting that Alexandria's Quakers effect an economic

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separation from the larger community of which they were members.<sup>1</sup> How Hartshorne, who had long been involved in the commercial life of northern Virginia, arrived at this extreme position is a story that reveals much about the tangled relationship between economic activity and religious belief. Equally important, his story reveals the impact of the larger community's growing sense of southernness on one religious minority outside the mainstream of southern life. In proposing his radical break Hartshorne effectively announced that Quakers should no longer participate in the slave-based economy of northern Virginia.

Hartshorne's early life in Virginia offered little foreshadowing of his future radicalism. Born in New Jersey in 1742, he moved south in 1774 at the tail end of a significant migration of Friends to northern Virginia that began in 1740s. In early 1775 he established a partnership with local merchant John Harper and in the 1780s established his own "general hardware and all purpose store," where he sold a wide variety of imported manufactured goods and purchased the agricultural products of the northern Virginia countryside. The town of Alexandria grew and prospered in the postrevolutionary years when northern Virginia's farmers shifted from tobacco to grains, sparking significant economic development. Hartshorne's business grew along with the town. Responding to the increased production of grains in the 1790s he constructed a mill on the outskirts of the town on what he soon called the Strawberry Hill plantation. By the early nineteenth century the mill had become the centerpiece of his business activities and in 1803 he moved his residence to the plantation. Hartshorne also invested heavily in Alexandria real estate, at his peak owning eighteen town lots. At the same time, he joined in the political life of the community. After Alexandria was incorporated in 1780 he served in the town government, beginning as a tax commissioner and surveyor of the streets, and eventually serving as a member of the city council in the late 1780s and early 1790s. Thereafter, he left

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1. Alexandria Monthly Meeting Minutes, Apr. 25, 1816 (Swarthmore College Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore, PA; hereafter FHL). On the free produce movement see Elias Hicks, *Observations on the Slavery of the Africans and their Descendants, and on the Use of the Produce of their Labour* (New York, 1814) and Ruth Anna Ketting Nuernberger, *The Free Produce Movement: A Quaker Protest Against Slavery* (Durham, NC, 1942).

active politics, though he remained a staunch Federalist and, like most Quakers, supported the new federal constitution in 1787.<sup>2</sup>

Still, Hartshorne, like all eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Friends, faced a constant tension between his religious ideals and worldly affairs. In the words of historian Frederick B. Tolles, the history of the Quakers is “a record of two plantations—the inward and the outward.” Even after the Quaker “reformation” of the late eighteenth century, when Friends increasingly withdrew from the seats of government and began isolating themselves from the main currents of American life, there remained a tension between their expressed religious values and American society and culture. Such stresses were inevitable; Quaker merchants and farmers were deeply enmeshed in the economic life of the new nation and could never completely isolate themselves from it.<sup>3</sup> Nowhere, however, was this tension more pronounced than in the American South. In the years during and after the American Revolution the Quaker faith gave rise to beliefs and practices, including opposition to slavery, that increasingly placed Quakers outside the mainstream of southern life. Nonetheless, Quakers throughout northern Virginia—the five counties bordering on the Potomac River from Alexandria west to the Shenandoah Valley—remained part of the southern economy and society, a society increasingly committed to slavery. As a result, their worldly endeavors required many to compromise, or at least limit the application of, their religious principles.

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2. This sketch of Hartshorne's economic and political activities is based on a wide reading of Alexandria newspapers between 1784 and 1810; see, however, T. Michael Miller, *Artisans and Merchants of Alexandria, 1780-1820* (2 vols., Bowie, MD, 1991), 1: xxiii-xxvi, 191-93, and William Wade Hinshaw, *Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy* (6 vols., Ann Arbor, MI, 1950), 6: 503, 746-47. On the growth and economic development of Alexandria and northern Virginia in the early republic see A. Glenn Crothers, “The Projecting Spirit: Social, Economic and Cultural Change in Post-Revolutionary Northern Virginia, 1780-1805” (Ph.D. diss., University of Florida, 1997), 58-102, 258-66, and *passim*. On Quaker support for the Constitution and the Federalists see David Brian Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, NY, 1975), 326.

3. Frederick B. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682-1763* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1948), 3-28, 230-43 (quote on p. 4); Jack D. Marietta, *The Reformation of American Quakerism, 1748-1783* (Philadelphia, PA, 1984).

The Quaker population of northern Virginia entered the region as part of a broader stream of immigrants from Pennsylvania in the 1730s and 1740s. By 1745 five Quaker meetings had been established in what would become Frederick and Berkeley counties, and another two meetings formed in the future Loudoun County.<sup>4</sup> Thereafter, the number of Quaker churches in northern Virginia grew rapidly. By 1790 there were twenty-one meetings in the counties of Fairfax, Loudoun, Berkeley, and Frederick. To ensure orthodoxy these northern Virginia meetings were integrated into the hierarchical Quaker structure of monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings. In 1802 the local meetings were organized into five monthly meetings: Hopewell and Crooked Run in the Shenandoah Valley and Goose Creek, Fairfax, and Alexandria in Loudoun and Fairfax counties. Until 1789 northern Virginia's meetings were part of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. In that year, however, they were transferred to the Baltimore Yearly Meeting.<sup>5</sup>

Along with Quaker organization the Friends of northern Virginia brought with them a sense of their own distinctiveness, a perception based on their peculiar spiritual ideas and principles. Dressed in plain clothing and possessed of a distinctive argot, religious doctrines, forms

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4. The five original Shenandoah Valley meetings were Providence (near Martinsburg), Hopewell (six miles north of Winchester), Centre (just south of Winchester), Crooked Run (three miles north of Front Royal), and Mt. Pleasant (southern Frederick County). The two Loudoun County meetings were Fairfax (Waterford) and Goose Creek (southwest Loudoun). Fairfax County was home to the Fairfax Monthly Meeting. See Jay Worrall, Jr., *The Friendly Virginians: America's First Quakers* (Athens, GA, 1994), 123-32; Stephen B. Weeks, *Southern Quakers and Slavery: A Study in Institutional History* (1896; rep., New York, 1968), 96-100; and Asa Moore and Werner Janney, *Ye Meetg Hous Smal: A Short Account of Friends in Loudoun County, Virginia, 1732-1980* (Lincoln, VA, 1980), 4-12.

5. Worrall, *Friendly Virginians*, 255-56, 263-64; Weeks, *Southern Quakers and Slavery*, 328-44; Hinshaw, *Encyclopedia*, 6: 357-60, 463-66, 589, 609-14, 725-28; Howard Beeth, "Outside Agitators in Southern History: The Society of Friends, 1656-1800" (Ph.D. diss., University of Houston, 1984), 19-95. According to Worrall, the total number of Quakers residing in Virginia in 1776 was approximately 4,000; it is unclear how many of these Friends resided in northern Virginia. However, even if half the Quaker population resided in the region, they represented less than 5 percent of the total population of northern Virginia, which totaled 41,000 in 1780; see Worrall, *Friendly Virginians*, 203; and Crothers, "Projecting Spirit," 236-37.

of worship, and a denominational discipline that required church members to marry within the sect, northern Virginia's Quakers purposefully created an exclusive and "clannish" community. Local Friends' sense of separateness was further enhanced by their emphasis on education and their ideological links to trans-Atlantic Quakerism. Northern Virginia's Quakers carried on an extensive correspondence with meetings throughout America, fielded annual queries from the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting that examined local Quakers' adherence to the sect's discipline, and welcomed frequent visitations by traveling or public Friends "called" to testify and witness in far-flung Quaker communities. In short, though shaped by their local surroundings and willing, like Hartshorne, to associate economically with outsiders, "Friends prided themselves on being a peculiar people unto the Lord, who did not seek converts and were content to draw in upon themselves."<sup>6</sup>

What distinguished Quakers most from other southerners—and from the vast majority of eighteenth-century Americans—was their stand against slavery. Since the late seventeenth century Friends had espoused three principles that eventually became the foundation of their antislavery testimony. First, they believed that all people possessed an "inner light" that made them equally capable of receiving God's grace. From this belief in humanity's spiritual equality arose the Quaker emphasis on the universal priesthood of believers, the golden rule—"Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them"—and their rejection of a trained clergy. Second, Quakers espoused pacifism, believing that it was wrong to take a human life because every individual potentially possessed the "light within." The Society rejected the use of force in favor of appeals to people's spiritual nature. Finally, Quakers believed that spiritual truth's simplicity should be reflected in their own lives. From this conviction came their plain dress, simple and direct language (including the refusal to swear oaths), and their rejection of ostentatious displays of wealth. Similarly, they celebrated industry and diligence, be-

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6. Brenda Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (New York, 1996), 15–18, 24–25, 35–36, 46–47, 61, 65, 130–31, 224–25, 252–53, 273–77; Beeth, "Outside Agitators," 96–288; Beeth, "Between Friends: Epistolary Correspondence Among Quakers in the Emergent South," *Quaker History*, 76 (Fall 1987), 108–27; Werner L. Janney and Asa Moore Janney, eds., *John Janney's Virginia: An American Farm Lad's Life in the Early 19th Century* (McLean, VA, 1978), 4.

lieving that useful labor—a “calling”—was one sign that an individual was committed to carrying out God’s will in this life. In contrast, many Friends believed that the ownership of slaves led masters to abandon simplicity in favor of sloth, luxury, and arrogance. Black slaves became for many Quaker merchants “symbols of conspicuous consumption,” a sign that they were more concerned with worldly than spiritual affairs. Thus, Friends’ belief in simplicity and the inner light, and the rejection of violence all pointed in the direction of antislavery conviction.<sup>7</sup>

Yet if the seeds of the Quaker rejection of slavery were carried in their religious doctrines it was many years before the Society of Friends officially condemned slaveholding by their members or within American society generally. Despite occasional protests from scattered meetings and a few exceptional individuals, throughout the first half of the eighteenth century many Quaker merchants actively participated in the slave trade and Friends from New England to North Carolina owned slaves. Indeed, the Quaker oligarchy of Philadelphia played a leading role in organizing the Atlantic slave trade, as did Quaker merchants in Rhode Island, despite the fact that the Philadelphia meeting had cautioned “Friends to avoid buying imported slaves” in 1716. These same Quaker leaders, the vast majority of whom owned slaves, dominated the influential Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, which played a central role in establishing Quaker discipline in America. Before the 1750s Philadelphia’s Quaker merchants actively discouraged antislavery activities by Society members, stopping the publication of Quaker antislavery writing and condemning radical abolitionists such as John Farmer, Ralph Sandiford, and Benjamin Lay, who disrupted the peace and broke the discipline of the Society.<sup>8</sup>

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7. Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers & Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton, NJ, 1985), 17–18, 78–79, 145; Tolles, *Meeting House*, 4–11, 51–62; Thomas E. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America* (New Haven, CT, 1950), 1–33; Beeth, “Outside Agitators,” 393–96, 398–401; Arthur J. Mekeel, *The Quakers and the American Revolution* (York, England, 1996), 2–3; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, NY, 1966), 306–16, 483–84.

8. Soderlund, *Quakers & Slavery*, 15–86 (quote on p. 21); Darold D. Wax, “Quaker Merchants and the Slave Trade in Colonial Pennsylvania,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 86 (Apr. 1962), 144–59; Anne T. Gary, “The Political and Economic Relations of English and American Quakers (1750–1785)” (Ph.D. diss., St. Hugh’s College, Oxford University, 1935), 169–84; Gary B. Nash, “Slaves and Slaveholders in Colonial Philadelphia,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 30 (Apr. 1973), 253–54; Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*, 31–47.

In the southern colonies the connection to slavery was even more difficult to break. Many Friends throughout the South owned slaves, often in significant numbers. Daniel Mifflin, father of Quaker abolitionist Warner Mifflin, owned close to 100 slaves on his Accomac County plantation before he freed them in 1775, while Robert Pleasants, Virginia's most prominent antislavery Friend, owned eighty slaves before the Revolution. Public or traveling Friends frequently commented on the prevalence of slaveholding among southern Quakers. In 1754, for example, Samuel Fothergill lamented that "Maryland is poor; the gain of oppression, the price of blood is upon that province—I mean their purchasing, and keeping in slavery, negroes." He added: "This very much describes also the state of Virginia." Equally disturbing, many slaveholding Quakers vigorously defended slave ownership, occasionally on biblical grounds. In 1757 traveling Friend John Woolman passed through Virginia and was told by one Quaker slaveholder that blacks were the descendants of Cain. "Their blackness," the Virginian claimed, is "the mark God set upon" them; "it is the design of Providence that they should be slaves." Such proslavery Quakers actively resisted alterations in the Society's slavery discipline, and before the late 1750s they were generally successful in thwarting change. When Woolman attended the Virginia Yearly Meeting he was horrified to discover that local Friends had altered the query of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting regarding slavery and the slave trade, watering down the pointed question, "Are there any concerned in the importation of negroes, or buying them after imported?" to read "Are there any concerned in the importation of negroes, or buying them to trade in?" Though Woolman lobbied against the change it was not corrected, despite Quakers' long-standing condemnation of the violence of the slave trade. The interest of many Virginia Quakers in slavery ensured that before 1758 "anti-slavery made little headway" in the colony.<sup>9</sup>

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9. *Ibid.*, 75–76, 83; George Crosfield, ed., *Memoirs of the Life and Gospel Labours of Samuel Fothergill with Selections from His Correspondence; Also an Account of the Life and Travels of His Father, John Fothergill, and Some Notices of His Descendants* (New York, 1844), 281–83; John Greenleaf Whittier, ed., *The Journal of John Woolman, and A Plea for the Poor* (1900; rep., Secaucus, NJ, 1972), 53–61; Worrall, *Friendly Virginians*, 145–51; Beeth, "Outside Agitators," 422–27 (quote on p. 423). See also Weeks, *Southern Quakers and Slavery*, 199–200; and Gary, "Political and Economic Relations," 185–87, 218–19. On the

In the 1750s, however, Quaker attitudes toward slavery began to change. The Seven Years War, which most Quakers interpreted as punishment for American sinfulness, convinced many of the sect's leaders to abandon their political offices and effect a thoroughgoing reform of the Society. For some Friends the drive to purify the Society took the form of insistent demands to enforce more strictly endogamy, sexual continence, and sobriety. The reformers' efforts bore fruit in 1762 when the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting revised the Book of Discipline. Other Friends argued, however, that only divorcing the Society completely from slaveholding would purify and purge it of worldliness.<sup>10</sup> In response

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Quaker distinction between slavery and the slave trade, first made in the 1690s, see Davis, *Slavery in Western Culture*, 313-16.

10. The question of why Quakers ended slavery within the Society after 1758 has sparked a lively and at times contentious debate focused on the relative importance of Quaker religious doctrine versus economic interests. The most sensitive of these works—best represented by the works of Jean Soderlund, J. William Frost, and Gary Nash—emphasize how the interaction of ideology and economics brought change in the Quaker discipline; see Soderlund, *Quakers & Slavery*, 112-77, esp. 170-71; Frost, "The Origins of the Quaker Crusade Against Slavery: A Review of Recent Literature," *Quaker History*, 67 (Spring 1978), 42-58, esp. 56-57; Frost, *The Quaker Family in Colonial America: A Portrait of the Society of Friends* (New York, 1973), 49; and Nash, "Slaves and Slaveholders," 253-54. For an interpretation that places greater emphasis on ideology see Marietta, *Reformation of Quakerism*, and "Egoism and Altruism in Quaker Abolition," *Quaker History*, 82 (Spring 1993), 1-22. In *Slavery in Western Culture*, 291-332, 483-93, and *Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 213-54, David Brion Davis finds that Quakers in America and England embraced abolition for both ideological and economic reasons. He argues that antislavery Friends, many of whom were wealthy merchants, were motivated by a combination of Quaker religious ideals, natural rights philosophy, and a desire to prove their moral worth while profiting from an exploitative capitalist economy. These accounts build on the earlier work of Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*, 48-84, and Tolles, *Meeting House*, 24-28, 234-39, who focus more heavily on Quaker ideology, though neither discounts the role of social and economic factors. Another older account, Sydney V. James, *A People Among Peoples: Quaker Benevolence in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA, 1963), 1-2, 103-168, 216-39, downplays the role of ideology, arguing that Philadelphia Quakers espoused abolition in order to retain political influence after they left provincial office in the 1750s. Recent forums in *Quaker History* and *The Southern Friend* have also addressed the issue of whether ideology or economic interests most heavily influenced the Quaker embrace of abolition; see Marietta, "Egoism and Altruism," 1-22; Jean Soderlund, "On Quakers and Slavery: A



to this call, in 1758 the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, the foremost meeting in America, decided to remove purchasers of slaves from positions of authority and established a committee, which included John Woolman, to visit slaveholders who refused to free their bondsmen. Over the next sixteen years the abolitionists worked to convince their fellow slaveholding Quakers to free their slaves, and in 1774 the yearly meeting resolved to disown any member who owned, bought, or sold a slave, a policy put into action in 1776.<sup>11</sup>

As part of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, the Quakers of northern Virginia likewise undertook a thoroughgoing reform of their meetings in the late eighteenth century. Quaker historian Jay Worrall has estimated that over 20 percent of Virginia Friends were disowned for various delinquencies, most frequently for marrying outside the sect or without the permission of the local meeting.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, during the American Revolution 8 percent of Virginia's male Quaker population of military age was disowned for violating the peace testimony. In northern Virginia this included Alexandria merchant William Hartshorne, who was investigated in 1779 for having "taken the Test," Virginia's loyalty oath. He was not restored to full membership until 1783 when he offered the Fairfax Monthly Meeting an "acknowledgment of his Deviation" from the Quaker discipline. Hartshorne was not alone. In the decade after

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Reply to Jack Marietta," *Quaker History*, 82 (Spring 1993), 23-27; Howard Beeth, "Historiographical Developments in Early North American Quaker Studies," *The Southern Friend*, 13 (Autumn 1991), 1-17; Steven Jay White, "Quaker Historiography Revisited: Another Look at Early American Quaker Studies," *ibid.*, 18-33; Jean Soderlund, "Response to 'Historiographical Developments in Early North American Quaker Studies,'" *ibid.*, 34-39; Jonathan Chu, "Recent Developments in Early North American Quaker Historiography: A Reply," *ibid.*, 40-54; and Beeth, "Methodology, Perspective, and Utility in Early North American Quaker Studies," *ibid.*, 55-66.

11. Soderlund, *Quakers & Slavery*, 98-103; Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*, 48-84.

12. Worrall, *Friendly Virginians*, 183-86; Mekeel, *Quakers and the American Revolution*, 7-8; Rayner W. Kelsey, "Early Disciplines of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting," *Bulletin of the Friends Historical Association*, 24 (Spring 1935), 20-30. Marietta, *Reformation of Quakerism*, 6-7, has calculated that marriage delinquencies represented 37.4 percent, sexual offenses 17 percent, and drunkenness 7.8 percent of all violations of the Quaker discipline in Bucks, Chester, and Philadelphia Quarterly Meetings. In contrast, slaveholding constituted only 0.9 percent of all violations.

1774 forty members of the Fairfax Monthly Meeting faced disciplinary action for taking oaths of loyalty, paying war taxes, hiring substitutes for militia service, or in a few cases actually joining the militia.<sup>13</sup>

Most important, after 1776 northern Virginia's Quakers were required to disown slaveholders. Though the region possessed a significant slave population—over 25 percent of the total population in 1787—most Quakers had little direct association with the peculiar institution. Still, Friends did not immediately disown violators of the discipline regarding slavery. As numerous Quaker accounts reveal, the local meetings worked hard to convince slaveholders of the error of their ways before resorting to the ultimate punishment of disownment. At local meetings members often rose to speak to the spiritual welfare of those Friends who still held slaves, and local and monthly meetings formed committees to visit slaveholding members who refused to manumit their bondsmen. Often these committees would be accompanied by a traveling Friend. Itinerant Norris Jones, for example, journeyed from Philadelphia to Virginia in 1788 with Sarah Harrison and undertook the “hard laborious work” of convincing local slaveholders to free their slaves. Between June 22 and June 27 Jones visited ten Friends who still owned slaves, eventually convincing five Quaker masters to free over thirty slaves, including one M. Bailey who owned twenty-two. “N.J.” was a particularly hard case. Norris visited him twice, finding on his first visit that “the most hardened spirit appeared in him that we have met with.” The next day, however, after saying “a good deal to him as we sat in the wagon . . . at length the power of the Highest softened his hard heart. He came and gave me his hand and was broken even to weeping.” “Miracles,” Norris concluded, “have not ceased.”<sup>14</sup>

The minutes of the Fairfax Monthly Meeting, Hartshorne's home meeting until 1802, are less dramatic, but they reveal the difficulty in getting slaveholders to relinquish their bondpeople. As early as 1762 the Fairfax meeting cautioned member Thomas Taylor that his recent “purchase of a Negroe” was “directly contrary to the Judgment of the Yearly Meeting.” He did not, however, relent. Despite “having been

13. Mekeel, *Quakers and the American Revolution*, 310–11; Worrall, *Friendly Virginians*, 204; Fairfax Monthly Meeting Minutes, Mar. 27, 1779, and Feb. 22, 1783 (Hartshorne); and Aug. 27, 1774–Feb. 22, 1783 (FHL), *passim*.

14. Gary, “Political and Economic Relations,” 191; Worrall, *Friendly Virginians*, 152, 229–30, 237–38; Crothers, “Projecting Spirit,” 36–37, 54.

much laboured with” over the course of the next fifteen years, he was “fixed to keep Slaves” and in November 1777 the Fairfax meeting, acting at the behest of the quarterly meeting, decided to disown him. But this was not the end of the story. After the intercession of Isaac Zane, a prominent local Quaker, Taylor was reinstated when he promised to free his slaves within two years. The meeting exercised similar patience with other local slaveholders. Despite an unequivocal statement from the local meeting in 1774 that “we Recommend to such Friends that have any . . . Slaves in their possession . . . to set them at liberty . . . as we Apprehend [that] they [slaves] have a Natural Right to freedom and Equal Justice as those of our own Color,” various members appointed to treat with slaveholders reported limited progress. A 1774 committee, for example, reported that only “one Friend . . . Signified to us he would” free his slaves. The issue still festered in 1778 when at the behest of the quarterly meeting a new committee was appointed “to take some further care to obtain Manumissions” of slaves.<sup>15</sup> In a region in which slavery was such an integral part of social and economic life, many Quakers found it difficult to disentangle themselves from the institution completely.

Manumission in northern Virginia went slower than elsewhere in the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in part because the colony’s—and later the state’s—laws made it difficult to free one’s slaves. Virginia statutes of 1723 and 1741 declared it illegal for masters to free their slaves “except for some meritorious services, to be adjudged and allowed by the governor and council . . . and a licence thereupon first had and obtained.” Slaves freed without proper authorization were to be re-enslaved and sold, with the proceeds going to the use of the local parish. In 1770, before the Philadelphia or Virginia Yearly meetings decided to make slaveholding an offence meriting disownment, a number of the colony’s quarterly meetings informed the yearly meeting that some slaveholders would free their slaves if it was legally permissible. In response, Friends from various meetings began a twelve-year campaign to convince the legislature to change the law. Efforts in 1770, 1772, and 1780, during

15. Fairfax Monthly Meeting Minutes, June 26, July 31, 1762; Oct. 25, Nov. 22, Dec. 27, 1777; Feb. 28, Mar. 28, Apr. 25, May 23, 1778 (Taylor); Aug. 27, 1774 (statement against slavery); July 25, 1778 (lack of progress) (FHL).

which Quakers cited natural rights doctrine and the Virginia Bill of Rights to make their case, all failed. The Society finally achieved success in 1782 when the assembly enabled slaveholders to free their slaves, but at the same time it refused to confirm the freedom of those blacks manumitted before the law took effect.<sup>16</sup>

The new law permitted Virginia Quakers to free their slaves without legal repercussions. Yet Friends in northern Virginia could not purge themselves completely of slavery. William Nicholls of the Goose Creek Meeting in Loudoun County owned slaves when he died in 1804, and William Gore was removed from the Alexandria meeting two years later for hiring slaves. In fact, slave-hiring was frequent enough among members of the Fairfax Quarterly Meeting—to which William Hartshorne's Alexandria meeting belonged—that in 1798 it queried the Baltimore Yearly Meeting for clarification about whether its members could continue to hire bondsmen. The Baltimore meeting replied in no uncertain terms: "The practice of hiring slaves is Contrary to our Christian Testimony & Discipline," and those who violated this "sense" should be disowned. Nonetheless, northern Virginia's Quakers continued to struggle with the issue of slavery in the late eighteenth century. Between 1760 and 1801 the Fairfax meeting disowned or disciplined some fourteen individuals for the ownership, purchase and/or sale, or hiring of slaves. Even for nonslaveholders like Hartshorne, contact with slavery could not be avoided. Though he never faced discipline from the Fairfax or

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16. William Walter Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the . . . the Year 1619* (13 vols., Richmond, VA, New York, and Philadelphia, PA, 1809-1823), 4: 132, 6: 112, 11: 39-40; Peter Joseph Albert, "The Protean Institution: The Geography, Economy, and Ideology of Slavery in Post-Revolutionary Virginia" (Ph.D. diss., University of Maryland, 1976), 168-74. The 1782 law was condemned almost immediately in a series of petitions calling for its repeal. Responding to these attacks, in 1785-1786 the Virginia legislature considered reversing the act, and in 1806 modified it to require all manumitted slaves to leave the state within one year; see *ibid.*, 210-65; Robert McColley, *Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia* (1964; 2nd ed., Urbana, IL, 1973), 161-62; and Frederika Schmidt and Barbara Wilhelm, "Early Proslavery Petitions in Virginia," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, 30 (Jan. 1973), 133-46. For the 1806 law see, Samuel Shepherd, ed., *The Statutes at Large of Virginia, from . . . 1792 to . . . 1806* (3 vols., 1835; rep., New York, 1970), 3: 251-53.

Alexandria meetings on the slave issue, his business dealings unavoidably brought him into close proximity with slave hiring and the profits of slave labor.<sup>17</sup>

Still, the vast majority of Virginia Friends accepted the discipline of the Society regarding slaveholding, and after ending slavery within their own ranks some attempted to do the same elsewhere in the United States. A number of northern Virginia's Quakers took an active role in these efforts. In 1783 the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting appointed Quaker abolitionists Anthony Benezet, Warner Mifflin, James Pemberton, and George Dillwyn to present a petition to the Confederation Congress calling for the an end to the slave trade, which was contrary to "every humane and righteous consideration, and in opposition to the solemn declarations often repeated in favour of universal liberty." Of the twenty Virginians who signed this petition eighteen were from northern Virginia meetings, including Hopewell, Centre, and Crooked Run in the Shenandoah Valley and Goose Creek and Fairfax in Loudoun and Fairfax counties. A committee headed by Thomas Jefferson considered the bill and recommended that Congress urge all states that had not yet ended the slave trade to do so. Congress rebuffed this and similar petitions in 1785 and 1786. The establishment of the new national government prompted Quakers to petition Congress in 1790 for an end to the slave trade, and again northern Virginia's Quakers joined their northern co-religionists in support of the petition. Though ultimately unsuccessful the petition aroused a bitter debate in Congress between northern defenders of the Quakers' right to speak and southerners who attacked Friends as a threat to public order and defended slavery on constitutional, biblical, and racial grounds. Moderate northern Virginia politicians such as George Washington and Alexander White thought the question best avoided. As Washington noted after the debate had ended, "the memorial of the Quakers (and a very mal-apropos one it was) has at length been put to sleep and will scarcely awake before the year 1808." Washington was correct; though Congress revisited the issue of the slave trade a number

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17. Janney and Janney, *Meetg Hous*, 60-62. Fairfax Quarterly Meeting Minutes, Dec. 18, 1797, Mar. 9, 1798, Oct. 15, 1798 (slave hiring); Alexandria Monthly Meeting Minutes, Feb. 20, 1806 (Gore); and Fairfax Monthly Meeting Minutes, June 26, 1782-June 27, 1801, *passim* (fourteen individuals disowned) (FHL).

of times before 1808, it buried all subsequent Quaker petitions against the trade.<sup>18</sup>

None of this opposition deterred active abolitionist Quakers in northern Virginia. Indeed, antislavery rhetoric often appeared in the public prints at the time. The 1790 obituary of "Negro Tom, the famous African Calculator" of Fairfax County, in Alexandria's newspaper provided a lengthy description of his prodigious mathematical abilities. Drawing on Quaker assumptions about the spiritual equality of humanity, the writer concluded that Tom's abilities demonstrated "the genius, capacity and talents of our ill-fated black Brethren," undermining the arguments of those who believed in the "supposed inferiority of their intellectual faculties." Such "sentiments," the author continued, were "as ill-founded in fact, as they are inhuman in their tendency." The trial of "Negro Moses," acquitted for murdering a particularly brutal overseer in 1791, elicited more antislavery attacks based on Quaker assumptions of human equality. "Many Bye-Standers," for example, argued that Moses was justified in killing his overseer because "by the laws of this country . . . a man, to preserve his own life, may kill the assailant." Such laws acknowledged "the weakness of human nature" and should, the writer argued, "be extended to slaves" because blacks and whites shared a common humanity. "Have they not the same feelings, passions, and frailties that white men have?" the writer asked, and should we "suppose the more enlightened a man is the more inexcusable he is in giving way to the passions and weaknesses of human nature?" The case of "Negro Moses," the writer concluded, can have only "good consequences"; it

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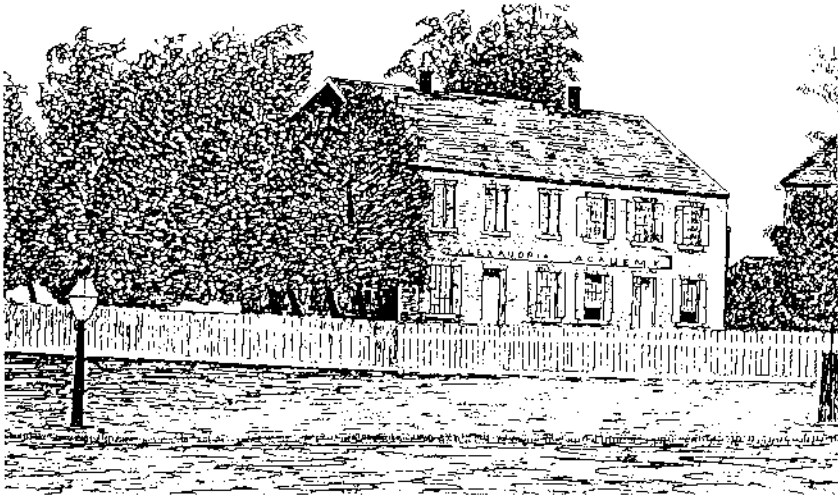
18. "Quaker Petition to the Continental Congress, October 4, 1783," *Am I Not a Man and a Brother: The Antislavery Crusade of Revolutionary America, 1688-1788*, ed. Roger Bruns (New York, 1977), 493-501; Worrall, *Friendly Virginians*, 237-38, 243-44; Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*, 92-95, 100-113; Stuart E. Knee, "The Quaker Petition of 1790: A Challenge to Democracy in Early America," *Slavery and Abolition*, 6 (Sept. 1985), 151-59; Washington to David Stuart, Mar. 28, 1790, in *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (39 vols., Washington, 1931-1944), 31: 30. See also Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1968), 325-35; Paul F. Boller, Jr., "Washington, the Quakers, and Slavery," *Journal of Negro History*, 46 (Apr. 1961), 85-88; and Boller, "George Washington and the Quakers," *Bulletin of the Friends Historical Association*, 49 (Autumn 1960), 78-79.

shows "that slaves do retain rights which are not to be violated and trampled on with impunity by cruel and inhuman Overseers." Whether this writer was a Quaker is unknown; his arguments, however, reveal the influence of the Society's religious doctrines and the natural rights philosophy.<sup>19</sup>

For visible Quakers such as Hartshorne the growth of local antislavery opinion could only be heartening. As one of Alexandria's most prominent merchants and an increasingly influential figure within the local Quaker meeting after 1785, juggling his business dealings and spiritual commitments could only have been easier in a society in which slavery was on the decline. And Hartshorne did not hide his religious affiliation. In both his private and business correspondence to non-Quakers he followed the Society's orthodoxy, refusing to name the days of the week and using "ye," "thy," and "thee" throughout. Indeed, as a Quaker businessman Hartshorne acquired a reputation for honesty and fair dealing. When London merchant Samuel Thorp was looking for a business contact in Maryland, Virginia planter William Lee recommended Hartshorne. He is, wrote Lee, "a sharp[,] keen quaker merchant in Alexandria[,] who can be trusted with safety." At the same time, Hartshorne started assuming positions of responsibility within the Quaker meeting. In 1792 he was appointed an overseer of the Alexandria Meeting of Worship, and the following year he began serving on a variety of committees investigating Friends who had violated the Quaker testimony (including one case dealing with a slaveholding member), examining those who wished to marry, and inspecting the meeting's financial records. In 1794 he played a prominent role in establishing a preparative meeting in Alexandria, and seven years later he led the successful effort to create a

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19. *Virginia Gazette and Alexandria Advertiser*, Dec. 9, 1790; Jan. 2, Feb. 17, 1791. Of course, other northern Virginians believed that the verdict of the trial would have "the most unhappy consequences." In particular, "A Bye-Stander" raised the specter of race war when he argued that it would "encourage disobedience in those who must submit, so long as they continue slaves; if they are taught to believe that they have a right to defend themselves from the restraints which their situations have hitherto subjected them to, and even kill the man who shall offer to controul them, I greatly fear, that the trial of Moses will be an aera from whence date the rise of many serious and awful consequences to the defenceless individuals of this country"; *ibid.*, Feb. 10, 1791.



The Alexandria Quaker meeting house, which cost \$4,000, was built in 1811 on the southwest corner of Wolfe and St. Asaph streets, and was used by local Friends until 1872, when it became a school known as the Alexandria Academy (from which time this image dates). The building was razed in the 1880s. Image courtesy of The Lyceum, Alexandria's History Museum.

monthly meeting in the town.<sup>20</sup> In short, Hartshorne was able to balance his spiritual and secular concerns and became a respected member both of local Virginia society and within his religious society.

Indeed, Hartshorne's civic activities were often shaped by his spiritual concerns. Most notably, in 1796 he assumed the presidency of the Alexandria Society for the Relief and Protection of Persons Illegally Held in Bondage, a local antislavery organization. The society was dominated by

20. For examples of Hartshorne's correspondence see the series of letters between Hartshorne and Thomas Massie in the Massie Family Papers, 1722-1893 (Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA; hereafter VHS); and the letters written by Hartshorne in the Hartshorne Family Papers, 1797-1957 (Haverford College Quaker Collection, Haverford, PA). William Lee to Samuel Thorp, Apr. 15, 1793, William Lee Letterbook, May 1792-May 1793 (VHS). For examples of Hartshorne's activities within the local Quaker meeting see Fairfax Monthly Meeting Minutes, May 26, 1792 (appointed overseer), Sept. 28, 1793 (investigates disowned Friend), Nov. 23, 1793 (investigates slaveholder), May 24, 1794 (establishment of preparative meeting), May 23, 1795 (investigates marriage), Sept. 24, 1796 (examines treasurer's records), Mar. 24, 1798 (Alexandria representative), and Jan. 23, 1802 (establishment of monthly meeting) (FHL).



local Quaker merchants such as Edward Stabler and John Janney, who were the group's first and second secretaries. Moreover, the society's constitution blended Quaker religious doctrines with the natural rights philosophy that did so much to shape revolutionary rhetoric. "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," the constitution began, were "Privileges derived from, and instituted by, the benevolent Creator and Father of the Universe, and with which he invested all nations of the earth, however diversified as to complexion, religion, or status in society." Thus "it is with deepest regret that feeling minds can view a coercive violation of all these privileges in the persons of our African Brethren." We are all, the constitution continued, "members of the same universal family"; therefore, it is "incumbent on all men . . . to diffuse the blessing of freedom to every part of the human race." The members of the present association pledged "themselves to use all lawful means" to relieve and protect "such as are illegally held in bondage." Society members proposed educational programs directed both "to the convictions of individuals" and for the benefit of enslaved African Americans, boycotts "of all commodities . . . cultivated or manufactured by slaves," and lobbying efforts to "obtain a repeal or amelioration of the laws respecting Slavery."<sup>21</sup>

The society soon had the opportunity to act on these principles. By late 1795 the activities of Virginia's abolition societies had roused the Virginia assembly to action. In December the assembly passed a new slave statute designed to establish clear procedures by which slaves could sue for their freedom and avoid the "great and alarming mischiefs [that] have arisen in other states . . . by the voluntary associations of individuals, who, under cover of effecting . . . justice towards persons unwarrantably held in slavery" have deprived "masters of their property in slaves." The act stipulated that slaves who sued for their freedom must "obtain counsel, to be assigned by the said court, who, without fee or reward, shall prosecute the suit of such complainant." As historian Robert Mc-

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21. *Virginia Gazette and Alexandria Advertiser*, Apr. 16, 12, 1796. Biographical information about the membership of the society was drawn from the following sources: *Alexandria Advertiser*, Aug. 29, 1797; Hinshaw, *Encyclopedia*, 6: 503, 520, 563-64, 746-47, 756, 781; and Miller, *Artisans and Merchants*, 1: 84, 191-92, 235; 2: 150, 174, 384, 416. On the prominence of Quakers within the abolition societies created in the 1780s and 1790s see Jordan, *White Over Black*, 359-60; and Davis, *Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 196-99, 209-210, 213-32.

Colley has noted, it was unlikely a lawyer assigned to such cases, dependent on the business of slaveholding planters, would be willing to prosecute a freedom suit with much vigor. In addition, the 1795 statute attempted to intimidate whites who aided blacks suing for their freedom by requiring them to pay \$100 to the slaveholder if the suit failed. In effect, the act “made a crime of an activity which, in most cases, was generous and humane.”<sup>22</sup>

In response, the Alexandria society under Hartshorne’s leadership publicly attacked the statute, pointing out how far it diverged from “the general *sentiments of justice*, and the *principles of the constitution*, as expressed in our *Bill of Rights*,” and calling for its “Repeal or . . . alteration.” A few months later the society petitioned the assembly for the act’s repeal. The petition noted that freedom suits were almost always prosecuted in the county courts “where the common court justices preside, and those justices often considerable slaveholders; under these circumstances the claimant must appear as clear as the sun at noon before it would be admitted for tryal.” In short, the law could be said to destroy “almost every suggestion of hope that any person . . . can obtain liberty by due process of law.” The petition brought no relief for the society or for slaves who initiated freedom suits. Having turned a deaf ear to such entreaties, in 1798 the legislature passed an even harsher act that directly targeted the state’s abolition societies. Free persons who incited slaves to insurrection or murder were now to be punishable by death, those who harbored slaves without the consent of the slave’s master were to be fined \$10, and members of antislavery societies were hereafter disqualified as jurors in suits in which slaves sued for freedom. With this statute the Virginia assembly assumed that “abolitionists were biased men who . . . were not to be trusted in a court of law.”<sup>23</sup>

Still, Hartshorne and the Alexandria society labored on. In 1797 the society had sixty-two members; between 1796 and 1801 it met regularly, announcing its meetings in the town’s newspapers. The Alexandria

22. Shepherd, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 1: 363–64; McColley, *Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia*, 159–61.

23. *Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Advertiser*, May 5, 1796; Petition from the Alexandria Abolition Society to the Virginia General Assembly, 1796, quoted in Nan Netherton et al., *Fairfax County, Virginia: A History* (Fairfax, VA, 1978), 210–11; Shepherd, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 2: 77–78; McColley, *Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia*, 161.

group also seems to have inspired Frederick County abolitionists to form their own society. Headed by Quaker Richard Ridgeway, the Winchester Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage met only for a brief period in 1796 and was not particularly active. Indeed, its one surviving public pronouncement announced that the society would not “interfere” in freedom suits involving slaves imported into the state, despite a 1785 statute that freed slaves who had been imported into the state and remained more than a year. The society, Ridgeway declared, would not take “advantage of those who through ignorance of . . . the laws of this commonwealth, have suffered their slaves to become entitled to their freedom.”<sup>24</sup> The leaders of the Winchester society faced the same problem that Alexandria Quakers like Hartshorne soon confronted; it was extremely difficult both to oppose slavery and maintain one’s social connections and livelihood in a society increasingly committed to slavery.

But in the late 1790s Hartshorne’s Alexandria society remained active, largely because it was led by a group of successful businessmen who possessed the economic resources to support it. The group’s reports to the American Abolition Societies’ conventions reflect its members’ continuing efforts to ameliorate the conditions of slavery in northern Virginia. In 1797, for example, Alexandria Quaker George Drinker took an active role in the fourth annual abolition convention in Philadelphia. Acting for the Alexandria society Drinker pointed out that a recent act

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24. “Minutes of the Proceedings for the Fourth Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Societies Established in Different Parts of the United States, Assembled at Philadelphia . . . 1797,” *The American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race: Minutes, Constitution, Addresses, Memorials, Reports, Committees and Anti-Slavery Tracts* (3 vols., New York, 1969), 1: 132. For the quarterly meetings of the Alexandria society see *Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette*, June 9, 1796, Feb. 23, 1797; *Alexandria Advertiser*, Aug. 24, 1797, Feb. 22, 1798; *Alexandria Advertiser & District of Columbia Daily Advertiser*, Aug. 30, 1798; *The Times, and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser* (Alexandria), Sept. 28, 1799, Feb. 28, 1800, May 7, 1801, May 29, 1801. For the Winchester society see *Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette*, Apr. 16, 1796. On Ridgeway see Hinshaw, *Encyclopedia*, 6: 437. That the society was defunct by 1797 can be inferred from the fact that it failed to respond to any of the queries posed by Convention of Abolition Societies in that year; see “Minutes of the Fourth Convention,” 1: 131–37.

of Congress regulating the slave trade was “defective” because “it does not prevent the shipment of slaves (for sale in the West Indies and elsewhere) on board vessels, not specially fitted out for that purpose.” He also presented a report from the society listing its recent accomplishments under Hartshorne’s leadership. Aiming both to “obtain legal justice for oppressed Africans” and “ameliorate their condition,” in December 1796 the society hired a schoolteacher and established a Sunday school for free and enslaved black children—though in the latter case, only if their masters “choose to send them.” When the school first opened, seventeen “scholars” were admitted, a number which after four months had grown to 108. The school’s curriculum consisted of “orthography, reading, writing, the more useful parts of arithmetic,” and “morals,” and the society was pleased that “many of the pupils . . . evince a strong desire and considerable aptitude for learning.” The society also reported that it had received twenty-six complaints from blacks illegally held in bondage. Of these, six were “relieved on the law against importation,” and the society was also actively pursuing two freedom suits in the Norfolk and North Carolina courts at its own expense. The other eighteen cases were “pending” but “doubtful.” In addition, the society reported that it was continuing its lobbying and educational efforts among the white population. A new petition protesting the 1795 slave law had been prepared and would soon be delivered to the Virginia assembly and the society would soon issue “a new publication . . . on the subject of slavery.” Finally, the society reported that the treatment of slaves in northern Virginia was “generally . . . less rigorous than formerly.”<sup>25</sup>

Four years later, however, the report of the Alexandria society, still headed by Hartshorne, was far less optimistic. Though three of the freedom suits pursued by the society locally had terminated in its favor, things otherwise looked bleak. Lack of available money, which had been used to pursue a freedom suit on behalf of five visiting free blacks from

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25. *Ibid.*, 1: 128–30, 133–36; see also “Minutes of the Proceedings for the Fifth Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Societies Established in Different Parts of the United States, Assembled at Philadelphia . . . 1798,” *ibid.*, 1: 164, when the Alexandria society reported “that many of their prosecutions for the recovery of the freedom of blacks and other persons of color, have been favorably terminated, and that considerable progress has been made in the education of those people, as well as in many other objects of their institution.”

Maryland claimed as slaves by an Alexandria resident, led the society to forgo representation at the 1801 convention. The black family lost their suit in the district court and were “violently wrested from their connexions,” sold “to a slave driver from North Carolina . . . and consigned, in all probability, to irredeemable slavery.” To add to the society’s woes, the white claimant, invoking the 1795 law that enabled slaveholders to sue anyone who aided a losing freedom suit, “took out a writ against one of the members of our Society who interfered” on behalf of the black family. Hartshorne’s own financial problems, which began in 1800, made it less likely that he could personally replenish the society’s funds. Most disturbing, the society had been forced to close their Sunday school. Gabriel’s Rebellion, that “unfortunate rising of the negroes at Richmond last summer,” sparked white fears of any black assembly. As a result, the society could find “no teacher of adequate merit” and was forced to “relinquish its patronage” of the school. Living under an “avowedly hostile” legislature and within a state where the “general custom gives . . . countenance to the disgraceful practice of slavery,” the Alexandria society had seen its membership diminish and was close to collapse.<sup>26</sup>

By mid-year the society was no more. Its last formal meeting took place in May 1801. In 1804 a former member could report that the society was “in fact dead; and I may say, I have no hope of reanimation.” He traced the demise of the organization in part to its decision to allow slaveholders to join. By the terms of a 1785 statute slaves imported into Virginia and remaining over a year were “declared free.” When the society pursued freedom suits involving such individuals the slaveholding members of the society, some of whom owned imported slaves, actively obstructed the society’s efforts. Composed of “discordant materials” the group disintegrated. The former member invoked the Quaker origins of the society when he argued that “nothing will contribute to our revival, but a more thorough conviction of a divine precept, and tenaciously adhered to; that is, to do unto others as they should do unto us.” In northern Virginia, however, this simple rule was ignored; instead, there was “a disposition to increase the measure of affliction apportioned to the poor deserted African.” Indeed, by 1802 Alexandria had become “a

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26. “Minutes of the Proceedings of the Seventh Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Societies Established in the Different Parts of the United States, Assembled at Philadelphia . . . 1801,” *ibid.*, 1: 240–43.

place of deposit” for slaves being transported from Maryland to the Deep South, and one could regularly see “fifty or sixty of those poor objects handcuffed and chained together, taking leave of their friends and relations, never to meet again.” The institution remained deeply embedded in northern Virginia’s social and economic life, despite the efforts of the society. “At present,” the writer concluded, “there are but few men . . . unpolluted by this debasing species of property.”<sup>27</sup>

The reasons for the decline of antislavery sentiment in Virginia are not hard to find. Historians have pointed to the slave revolts in Santo Domingo that began in 1791 and continued through 1804 and to Gabriel’s Rebellion as the key events that crystallized the shift in opinion and led to a growing sense of southern distinctiveness. In the wake of the latter revolt, the Virginia legislature passed a series of laws restricting the movement of slaves and free blacks. These events convinced most white Virginians that blacks and whites could live in peace only if the former were held in chains. The same sense of unease was felt in northern Virginia and caused many to see the abolition society as a source of black unrest. According to Elisha C. Dick, a prominent physician and public official, abolition societies tended to produce “the most serious calamities.” Writing to Governor James Monroe in the wake of Gabriel’s Rebellion, Dick called for “immediate legislative measures . . . to restrain if not entirely suppress the schools supported by” antislavery advocates. These schools, he continued, “are constantly inculcating natural equality among the blacks of every description[;] they are teaching them with great assiduity the only means by which they can at any time be enabled to concert and execute a plan of general insurrection.”<sup>28</sup> A few years

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27. *The Times; and District of Columbia Daily Advertiser* (Alexandria), May 29, 1801; “Minutes of the Proceedings of the Tenth American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race, Assembled at Philadelphia . . . 1805,” *Convention of Abolition Societies*, 1: 371–76; Hening, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 12: 182; Jordan, *White Over Black*, 400, 320. Because the Alexandria society was committed to aiding free blacks—particularly those who were illegally enslaved—it attracted a few humanitarian slaveholding members when it was originally organized.

28. McColley, *Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia*, 107–13; Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (1943; rep., New York, 1974), 218–26, 235–39; Jordan, *White Over Black*, 375–402. For samples of post-Gabriel’s Rebellion Virginia slave laws see Shepherd, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 2: 279–80, 300–301, 326. Dick to Governor Monroe, Sept. 26, 1800, in *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*,

later another Alexandria writer could write more calmly but with no less conviction that though slavery may be “an inveterate cancer” in society, the “peace which most men seek in retirement” “makes us rather bear those ills we have, than try experiments which we know not of.” Thus, “necessity” forced Virginia to retain slavery, and in such a state there was no place for abolition societies. Sabotaged from within by slaveholding members who became “industrious opponents” when their own human property was threatened by the society’s lawsuits, and threatened from without by legal and social pressures, the abolition society found it could not survive when white support for an increasingly severe slave regime swelled in northern Virginia.<sup>29</sup>

But could the Society of Friends, whose members had followed their religious precepts and established the abolition society, survive in this environment? For Friends whose beliefs were sincere, the choices were stark indeed. As historian David Brion Davis has noted “in the contest between the internal discipline of the sect and the external discipline of the slave regime” southern Quakers “could only become apostate accommodationists, genuine subversives, or emigrants.” Many—perhaps most—made the latter choice. Entire meetings disappeared from across the South, particularly in North Carolina, as thousands of Quakers moved to Ohio and Indiana to live free of slavery. Between 1780 and 1820 the northern Virginia monthly meetings—Alexandria, Crooked Run, Fairfax, Goose Creek, and Hopewell—granted certificates of removal to 310 individuals, many of whom were heads of families. As a result, at least eleven local meetings were “laid down” in the postrevolutionary decades.<sup>30</sup>

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and *Other Manuscripts* (11 vols., Richmond, VA, 1875–1893), 9: 178. For most of his life Dick was “a gay, fashionable man” and a prominent member of northern Virginia’s slaveholding elite. In 1812, however, he joined the Alexandria meeting and became an antislavery advocate; see Samuel M. Janney, *Memoirs of Samuel M. Janney, Late of Loudoun County, Virginia* (Philadelphia, PA, 1881), 10–11; and Hinshaw, *Encyclopedia*, 6: 738.

29. *Alexandria Advertiser and Commercial Intelligencer*, Mar. 30, 1803; “Minutes of the Tenth Convention,” 1: 372.

30. Davis, *Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 207–208; Weeks, *Southern Quakers and Slavery*, 245–85 (esp. 269); Worrall, *Friendly Virginians*, 265–71, 304; Thomas D. Hamm, *The Transformation of American Quakerism: Orthodox Friends, 1800–1907* (Bloomington, IN, 1988), 13–15; Philip J. Schwarz, *Migrants Against Slavery: Virginians and the Nation* (Charlottesville, VA, 2001), esp.

In contrast, few Quakers became genuine subversives. For many Friends the growing quietism of the Society after the Revolution—the desire to purify the church of all worldly trappings—undermined the sect's activist tendencies. There were always a significant number of Quakers who opposed active antislavery organizing, frequently forcing activists to ally with non-Friends. For Quaker farmers like Thomas Janney, who resided in isolated Quaker enclaves such as Goose Creek in Loudoun County, partial withdrawal from the world was an option. Similarly, the memoirs of some of Alexandria's leading Quakers—Edward Stabler, Samuel Janney, and Benjamin Hallowell—reveal an ongoing commitment to Quaker principles but only limited social activism.<sup>31</sup> However, for Quaker merchants like Hartshorne who had become deeply enmeshed in the developing commercial economy of postrevolutionary northern Virginia, neither withdrawal nor revolution was a viable option. What, then, of these individuals? Did they become Davis's "apostate accommodationists"?

Certainly some did. Another member of the large Janney family of northern Virginia, John Janney, son of Alexandria merchant Elisha, moved to Leesburg, Loudoun County, in the early nineteenth century to practice law. When he purchased his first slave in 1834 he left the Leesburg meeting and joined the local Episcopal church. Public Friends who traveled to northern Virginia frequently lamented such backsliding. After

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81–84; Hiram H. Hilty, *Toward Freedom For All: North Carolina Quakers and Slavery* (Richmond, IN, 1984), 97; Beeth, "Outside Agitators," 465–67; and Larry Dale Gragg, *Migration in Early America: The Virginia Quaker Experience* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1980).

31. On the quietism of the Society of Friends in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, see Rufus M. Jones, *The Later Periods of Quakerism* (2 vols., London, 1921), 1: 32–103; Tolles, *Meeting House*, 230–43; Margaret Hope Bacon, *The Quiet Rebels: The Story of the Quakers in America* (Baltimore, MD, 1985), 80–85; Hamm, *Transformation*, 2. Quaker quietism undermined Robert Pleasants's 1790 efforts to establish the Virginia Abolition Society. Encountering significant opposition from members of his sect, he was forced to cooperate with Methodists; see Albert, "Protean Institution," 176–77; Janney and Janney, *Janney's Virginia*, 3–4; William Stabler, *A Memoir of the Life of Edward Stabler, Late of Alexandria in the District of Columbia* (Philadelphia, PA, 1846); Janney, *Memoirs*; and Benjamin Hallowell, *Autobiography of Benjamin Hallowell* (Philadelphia, PA, 1884).



his visit in 1798 Joshua Evans wrote, "I thought there was much needed to be done and few to put a hand to the wheel." Similarly, Rachel Price, who visited a decade later, wrote that she was "often under discouragement" during her time among northern Virginia Friends.<sup>32</sup> Negotiating between the spiritual demands of the sect and the economic and social life of a slave society was a difficult task that involved frequent compromises and accommodations. Hartshorne's experience reveals just how challenging mediating these two worlds could be.

At first glance, it would seem that Hartshorne's economic and political activities did not interfere with his spiritual commitments. Most important, he did not own slaves or hire them directly. Yet a closer look at his business activities reveals that he applied his Quaker principles quite casually, skirting the line of the sect's discipline. As a merchant whose continuing prosperity depended on attracting northern Virginia farmers to Alexandria, Hartshorne—along with other Quaker merchants—played important roles in the development of the region's transportation infrastructure. In 1784 Washington became the first president of the Potomac River Company, which was designed to make the Potomac River navigable by clearing and building canals around the worst obstructions. The company attracted widespread support from the planters and merchants of northern Virginia. Of the original 182 investors at least seven were Quakers; Hartshorne became both a director and the company's treasurer. Participation in such economic enterprises was not unusual among Friends, either in America and England. Yet the Potomac River Company depended heavily on slave labor to clear the river. In 1785 after first attempting to use white indentured servants, the company's directors decided to hire 100 black slaves; between 1786 and 1803 the company hired between 100 and 200 black slaves per year. "The labour of the Potomack Company," concluded company directory Thomas Sim Lee, "is best performed by Negroe Slaves" because they were more easily controlled than "common white Hirelings" and their "services can be depended on in all seasons of the year." Hartshorne's reaction to this

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32. Anne Sarah Rubin, "Between Union and Chaos: The Political Life of John Janney," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 102 (July 1994), 385–88; Joshua Evans and Rachel Price, quoted in Janney and Janney, *Meets Hous*, 26–27.

decision is not recorded, but he relinquished neither his company position nor his stock—nor did the company's other Quaker investors.<sup>33</sup>

When the Potomac River Company failed to open the river for more than three or four months a year, northern Virginia's merchants and farmers sought out other means to link Alexandria to its hinterland. In 1802, in response to repeated requests from the residents of the region, the Virginia legislature incorporated the Little River Turnpike Company to build a paved road between Alexandria and the Blue Ridge. Among the pike's investors were Quaker merchants Hartshorne and Phineas Janney, who became the company's treasurer and president, respectively. A member in good standing of the Goose Creek meeting, Janney sent reports to the Virginia Board of Public Works that were invariably "filled with 'thee' and 'thou' and common sense." His reports, however, also documented the use of hired slave labor to construct and maintain the road. As early as 1803 Richard Radcliffe, one of the contractors hired by the company, advertised for hired slaves. He promised "good usage to, and punctual payment for their services." Similar advertisements would appear over the next ten years as the company completed construction of the road. In the slave economy of northern Virginia ambitious Quaker merchants like Hartshorne and Janney could not disentangle themselves from slavery.<sup>34</sup>

More problematic still was Hartshorne's involvement in the Alexandria Marine Insurance Company. Chartered by the Virginia legislature in 1797, the insurance company was formed as a response to British and French depredations on American shipping during the Napoleonic Wars. During these years, the usual British sources of marine insurance dried up—particularly policies that covered trade with Britain's enemies,

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33. On the history of the Potomac River Company and its use of slave labor see Crothers, "Projecting Spirit," 85–87, 103–167, esp. 134–36. The seven Quaker investors were Hartshorne, Benjamin Shreve, Joseph Janney, Joseph Hough, Israel Thompson, William Brown, and Joseph Holmes; see *ibid.*, 493–514; and Worrall, *Friendly Virginians*, 300.

34. On the history of the Little River Turnpike Company and its use of slave labor see Crothers, "Projecting Spirit," 86–87, 168–231, esp. 214–15. On Phineas Janney see Hinshaw, *Encyclopedia*, 6: 668; and Miller, *Artisans and Merchants*, 1: 236–37; Worrall, *Friendly Virginians*, 300; and Fairfax Harrison, *Landmarks of Old Prince William: A Study of Origins in Northern Virginia* (2 vols., Richmond, VA, 1924), 2: 564–65, 577 (quote).

France and Spain. Given the difficulty of communications, local underwriters could provide insurance for Alexandria-based vessels more quickly and conveniently than their growing number of northern competitors. By the early nineteenth century, Alexandria's marine insurance company, presided over by Hartshorne, was a thriving entity, insuring over 200 ships per year. Yet among the ships that the company bonded in 1809 was at least one bound from Alexandria to New Orleans and owned by local merchants Thomas Brooke and George Boyd. The ship carried thirty slaves insured for \$9,000. At the base of the insurance certificate Hartshorne had signed his name. How many more slave cargoes the insurance company secured is unknown. It is likely given the growing movement of slaves from Maryland and Virginia to the Deep South that it was not the only such cargo. Still, the violation of Quaker principle—if not discipline—is clear.<sup>35</sup>

In fact, Hartshorne's attempt to convince the Alexandria meeting to stop purchasing the products of slave labor in 1816 reveals that he eventually recognized the moral dilemma posed for Friends who profited from slavery. But he did not arrive at this conclusion easily. Between 1800 and 1816 Hartshorne faced a series of economic shocks that shattered his social standing within the Alexandria community, reduced his status within the local meeting, and ultimately reshaped the balance between the secular and spiritual in his life. As a result, by 1816 he did not have as much to lose through his more vigorous opposition to slavery. Evidence of his financial problems first arose in January 1800 when he placed an advertisement in the local paper announcing that his firm could no longer make payments to "our Creditors" because of "heavy losses" caused "by the late failures in Baltimore." Compounding his problems,

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35. Crothers, "Commercial Risk and Capital Formation in Early America: Virginia Merchants and the Rise of American Marine Insurance, 1750–1815," *Business History Review* (Winter 2005); Joseph Stancliffe Davis, *Essays in the Earlier History of American Corporations* (2 vols., 1917; rep., New York, 1965), 2: 245; Shepherd, ed., *Statutes at Large*, 2: 89–92; Insurance Policy No. 2157, Marine Insurance Company of Alexandria, Virginia: Insurance Policies, May 18, 1807–Nov. 8, 1810 (VHS). On the movement of slaves from the upper to Deep South after 1806 see Eugene Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (1961; 2nd ed., Middletown, CT, 1989), 136–37; Lewis Cecil Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (2 vols., 1932; Gloucester, MA, 1958), 2: 650–61.



This Alexandria harbor scene appeared in an antislavery broadside published in New York in 1836 and shows a boatload of slaves being rowed to an awaiting vessel that would carry them to Southern ports for sale. Image courtesy of The Lyceum, Alexandria's History Museum.

a year later his mill at Strawberry Hill was burned to the ground, the result of his decision to use a corn kiln newly patented by local inventor George Deneale. In the first months after the fire, Hartshorne believed his business would recover from the “misfortune,” writing to Frederick County planter Thomas Massie that “By the assistance of Providence and my Friends I hope to have my Mill rebuilt and going again in a much better situation by next Winter.” Local merchants such as Joseph Riddle concurred. Hartshorne, Riddle wrote some weeks after the fire, “is making rapid progress in the new Mill—and expects to have her ready to grind the new crop. . . . We have not the least doubt but that he will pay all demands against him, and leave something to his family.” He “possesses,” Riddle concluded, “the undiminished confidence of all good men, with whom he is acquainted.”<sup>36</sup>

But before Hartshorne made a full recovery, Thomas Jefferson’s 1807 embargo effectively suspended American exports to Europe and the West Indies and closed the port of Alexandria. Soon Hartshorne faced

36. *Columbian Mirror and Alexandria Gazette*, Jan. 30, 1800; *Alexandria Advertiser and Commercial Intelligencer*, Mar. 5, 1801; *The Times; and District of Columbia Advertiser* (Alexandria), Mar. 6, 1801; Hartshorne to Thomas Massie, Mar. 10, 1801, Massie Family Papers (VHS; quote); Joseph Riddle to William Hartshorne, Jr., [Mar.] 1801, Joseph Riddle and Company Letterbook, 1800–1802 (Library of Virginia, Richmond; quote); Crothers, “Projecting Spirit,” 407–408.

bankruptcy. In 1810 the Alexandria meeting began investigating his business affairs because members believed “his estate will not prove sufficient to meet all his engagements.” Hartshorne was forced to liquidate his assets—excluding those of his second wife Susannah—in order to meet the demands of his creditors. Equally striking, he became a cipher within the Alexandria meeting after 1809. As a founding member of the meeting he had played a key role in shaping its early direction, serving on numerous committees, as Alexandria’s representative to the quarterly meeting, and in a variety of additional leadership roles. In contrast, between July 1809 and April 1816 his name did not appear in the minutes unrelated to the investigation of his business affairs. It was also during the first years of Hartshorne’s financial troubles that the local antislavery society that he headed collapsed.<sup>37</sup> For Hartshorne these years were a time of personal crisis that simultaneously forced him to abandon his civic and religious responsibilities and reevaluate his own actions and moral convictions.

Changes in Hartshorne’s family life also seem to have played a role—at least indirectly—in stiffening his stand against slavery. In the 1790s, when he was deeply immersed in the local economy, Hartshorne supported a growing family of three daughters and four sons. By 1814 his children were grown and no longer his direct responsibility. While his daughter Rebekah married prominent Alexandria merchant and Quaker Mordecai Miller in 1792, it was not until 1808 that his daughter Mary married Quaker merchant minister, Edward Stabler, and it was 1811 before his youngest daughter Sarah married Phineas Janney, another local Quaker merchant. Meanwhile, Hartshorne’s son, William Jr., moved south to Norfolk, Virginia, in 1802 where he established his own mercantile firm with his father’s aid. Four years later his son Robert moved north to New York City, followed in 1809 by a second son, Pattison; both joined the Quaker meeting in that city. Finally, in 1814 his youngest son, Peter, moved to Baltimore and left the Society of Friends. More tragically, in 1801 Hartshorne’s first wife, Susannah, who since 1797 had been an elder in the Fairfax meeting, died. In 1803 he married Susannah Shreve, the widow of Benjamin Shreve. Hartshorne’s second marriage reflected his still-respected social standing in 1803; Sh-

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37. Alexandria Monthly Meeting Minutes, Apr. 26, 1810 (quote); and July 20, 1809–Jan. 25, 1816, *passim* (FHL).

reve had been both a prominent Quaker and prosperous local businessman. The marriage must have provided Hartshorne an important emotional haven in the difficult years that followed. Equally important, the financial resources Susannah brought to the marriage—and which evidently remained in her own name—furnished Hartshorne with a crucial economic buffer during his bankruptcy.<sup>38</sup>

Eventually, Hartshorne was cleared of any wrongdoing and fully reinstated by the meeting, which declared that his failure was a result of causes beyond his control: “the payment of heavy interest for several years . . . and a considerable loss sustained . . . at the time the late embargo took place.”<sup>39</sup> But by 1816 Hartshorne’s personal life had been transformed. With his children grown he no longer faced the onerous financial obligations imposed by a growing family, and with the collapse of his business he had no direct economic ties to or dependence on the regional slave economy. In short, by 1816 Hartshorne had little to lose and was free to pressure the meeting and his fellow Quakers to break all ties to slave labor and profits. The respected and respectable Quaker businessman, the pillar of the community and the society, had taken the radical road. He had become one of Davis’s “subversives,” but his decision to do so was possible only after he had become disengaged from the regional, slave-based economy from which he had profited for so many years.

Little came of Hartshorne’s efforts. A few months after he raised the free produce issue, he passed away and the Alexandria meeting—at least for the moment—chose to bury the issue he raised.<sup>40</sup> And little wonder. For ambitious Friends like Hartshorne, living in northern Virginia constituted a constant challenge. Most of them remained enmeshed in the economy of the region and thus could not avoid entangling themselves in slavery. Yet at the same time most remained deeply committed to

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38. Fairfax Monthly Meeting Minutes, Nov. 24, 1792 (Rebekah’s marriage), Mar. 27, 1802 (William Jr. moves to Norfolk); Alexandria Monthly Meeting Minutes, June 23, 1808 (Mary’s marriage), Oct. 24, 1811 (Sarah’s marriage), May 22, 1806 (Robert moves to New York), Nov. 23, 1809 (Pattison moves to New York), Sept. 22, 1814 (Peter moves to Baltimore), July 21, 1803 (Hartshorne’s second marriage), July 26, 1810 (Susannah’s financial independence) (FHL). See also Hinshaw, *Encyclopedia*, 6: 503, 746–47.

39. Alexandria Monthly Meeting Minutes, July 26, 1810 (FHL).

40. Hinshaw, *Encyclopedia*, 6: 746–47.

Quaker principles and conceits. After 1800, however, maintaining these principles became difficult as the region's dependence on slavery strengthened. In order to prosper, Friends were forced to compromise the rigor of their principles. Respected for their industry but disparaged for their opposition to slavery, holding positions of economic and political authority yet deliberately standing apart from the society in which they prospered, Alexandria's Quakers occupied a tenuous position within the white community that forced them to make hard moral choices. In the end, the region's growing commitment to slavery compelled those who wished to thrive in the South to compromise their religious and moral beliefs.