

# This Side of the Grave

## Navigating the Quaker Plainness Testimony in London and Philadelphia in the Eighteenth Century

Patricia C. O'Donnell

*For observant members of the Society of Friends in greater London and Philadelphia during the eighteenth century, navigating the Quaker plainness testimony involved material culture choices that might be viewed by non-Quakers as concealing motives of frugality or blurring class lines or as violating standards of decency and propriety. This was particularly true of coffins, which were carried through the streets from home to burial ground followed by family and friends. On this public stage, Quaker coffin choices satisfied the requirements for plainness while at the same time they demonstrated family values and fulfilled societal expectations.*

IN THE SIXTY-FIVE YEARS since Frederick B. Tolles published his seminal work on Philadelphia's Quaker mercantile elites, *Meeting House and Counting House*, scholars continue to explore how the plainness testimony was manifested in material culture. Tolles's thesis—that the Quaker aesthetic consisted of “the best sort, but plain”—was based primarily on the written record, not on the objects themselves.<sup>1</sup> Scholars studying Quaker material culture since Tolles have struggled to find groups of objects with adequate provenance in order to explore the ways in which Quaker plain style was manifested. *Quaker Aesthetics*, edited by Emma Lapsansky and Anne Verplanck, examined the material culture of Friends from Philadelphia and the Delaware Valley in more depth.<sup>2</sup> Lapsansky wrote

Patricia C. O'Donnell is archivist at Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Barnes Tolles, “‘Of the Best Sort but Plain’: The Quaker Esthetic,” *American Quarterly* 11, no. 4 (1959): 499.

<sup>2</sup> Emma Jones Lapsansky and Anne A. Verplanck, eds., *Quaker Aesthetics: Reflections on a Quaker Ethic in American Design and Consumption* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

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that Quakerism contains “a number of contradictory values: equality and separateness; intellectual preciousness and anti-intellectualism; an emphasis on excellence and a focus on humility; and an appreciation for high quality workmanship coupled with a ban on ostentation.”<sup>3</sup> Clearly these contradictions complicate any discussion of the Quaker plainness testimony.

Quaker-owned coffins offer potential for researchers to understand Friends' conceptions of plainness. At funerals, societal expectations for a ceremony and accoutrements honoring the family's status came into potential conflict with the Quaker plainness testimony. The coffin drew attention from observers at eighteenth-century funeral processions. As public artifacts, coffins were the subjects of contemporary comment, some evidence of which survives in archives today. In *Quaker Aesthetics*, both Susan Garfinkel and Bernard L. Herman emphasized the fact that the plain object cannot be viewed apart from the context of its production and use.<sup>4</sup> Coffins tend to have provenance, at least in terms of place. This provenance in turn can be linked to practices that could vary from one

<sup>3</sup> Emma Jones Lapsansky, “Past Plainness to Present Simplicity,” in Lapsansky and Verplanck, *Quaker Aesthetics*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Bernard L. Herman, “Eighteenth-Century Quaker Houses in the Delaware Valley and the Aesthetics of Practice,” 188; and Susan Garfinkel, “Quakers and High Chests: The Plainness Problem Reconsidered,” 50, both in Lapsansky and Verplanck, *Quaker Aesthetics*.

monthly or yearly meeting to another. This is why funerary objects provide good material evidence of accommodation to Friends' testimonies.

Consider, for example, the letter written by David Cooper, an overseer and elder of Woodbury Friends Meeting, on the occasion of a child's burial at the meeting house in New Jersey on February 16, 1783. He was so concerned about indecorous behavior that he wrote to scold the child's parents even in their bereavement. Cooper was shocked to see four female bearers in the funeral procession, only one of whom was a Quaker, dressed in white with powdered hair and without bonnets. Friends avoided powdered hair as superfluous, and Quaker women were expected to cover their heads modestly. Although non-Friends wore white if the deceased was a young, unmarried girl, Quakers avoided it both as contemporary fashion and as specific mourning attire.<sup>5</sup> He went on to say:

Respected Friends,—I attended the burial of your innocent child on Sixth-day last, and was much affected, as I believe every solid Friend present also was, with the manner of carrying it to the grave; so different from the plainness and simplicity into which our principles lead. I need not remind you that we profess to be a plain self-denying people, called to bear a testimony against the vain and foolish fashions of the world. These never appear more idle and inexcusable than at funerals, when our minds ought to be impressed with a most solemn and awful sense of our own mortality, and the sense of uncertainty in which we exist. This would leave us carefully to avoid anything like pride, pomp or show on these occasions. I did think the occasion called for some remarks of this sort at the grave, but was fearful it could not well be borne. As however it is a subject of conversation among Friends, and which perhaps none may be kind enough in a proper manner to acquaint you with, I thought both friendship and duty required it from me, and in this way, as verbal conversation is sometimes misapprehended.<sup>6</sup>

This essay presents archival evidence on what constituted a "decent" funeral among eighteenth-century British and Mid-Atlantic Protestants, followed

<sup>5</sup> Phillis Cunningham and Catherine Lucas, *Costume for Births, Marriages, and Deaths* (London: A. and C. Black, 1972), 192. The yearly meetings continued to warn against pride in the form of epistles to constituent meetings. "The Minutes of the Yearly Meeting of Women friends held at Philadelphia ye 24<sup>th</sup> of ye 7<sup>th</sup> Month 1729. It is the desire of this Meeting that our Epistle in 1726 Against pride be frequently Read in our Severall Monthly & Quarterly Meetings of Women friends & all friends are desired Carefully to Maintain the Testimony of our Ancient friends Against Wareing [*sic*] Black or Black & White Cloaths at Burialls."

<sup>6</sup> Letter from D. C. to \_\_\_ and wife, February 16, 1783, transcribed in "Notices of David Cooper," *Friends' Review* 15, no. 45 (July 12, 1862): 707. *Friends' Review* and other Quaker publications regularly published the memoirs and writings of exemplary Quakers.

by archival and archaeological evidence on coffins during this time period. The organizational structure and beliefs of the Society of Friends provide the necessary background for understanding the plainness testimony. Further documentation from Quaker coffins made in the London area and Delaware Valley demonstrates how Friends' coffins differed from those of other Protestants. The tendency for London-area Friends to select polished coffins with few fittings and for Delaware Valley Friends to select gable-lidded coffins shows two ways that members of these yearly meetings navigated the potential conflicts between plainness and status.

#### A "Decent Funeral": Eighteenth-Century British and Mid-Atlantic Protestant Funerals

During the eighteenth century in England and its Middle Atlantic colonies, the final journey from deathbed to grave was structured and correlated with class and status. The collective ritual as understood by Protestants on both sides of the Atlantic had several distinct elements, including preparation of the body in the home, the funeral procession, the religious service, and interment. Although this essay deals primarily with the second element, all were essential to a so-called decent funeral. While the origins of the symbolic aspects of the ritual had been long forgotten, they were nonetheless essential to what was perceived as proper and appropriate. Standards of propriety and respectability were understood by all in the wider community, and a family was judged by its ability to do right by its departed member. For all classes of society, the display was expected to be appropriate to the family's status. Anything less was shameful; anything more was pretentious and prideful.

Contemporary sources, both published and private, give a sense of what was considered overly prideful. For example, in 1797 in Charleston, South Carolina, the *City Gazette* published a cautionary tale about the poor widow of a day laborer in England. "Yet the worst thing they had to say of her, was that she was proud; which they said, was manifested by the manner in which she buried her husband. Resolute, as she owned she was, to have the funeral, and every thing that related to it, what she called decent, nothing could dissuade her from having handles to his coffin, and a plate on it, mentioning his age."<sup>7</sup> In 1807 Philadelphia diarist Elizabeth

<sup>7</sup> *City Gazette and Daily Advertiser* (Charleston, SC), May 17, 1797, 2.

Sandwith made note of the overly elaborate procession of Michael Callahan to Christ Church: “MCs funeral bespoke something grand; two parsons, the 8 carriers presented with gloves; the Coffin [*sic*] mahogany with guilt [*sic*] handles, his name & age &c. on the top.”<sup>8</sup> Callahan’s funeral consumed the last of his fortune and left his young wife and children destitute.

Yet concerns about prideful display did not absolve survivors from providing ceremonial gifts and refreshment. Pallbearers and relatives were typically given mementos such as gloves and scarves. Refreshments were served to all guests after the burial. At a time when an independent London artisan might earn upwards of £100 per annum, funerals for the middling sort could cost more than £10.<sup>9</sup> Wealthier citizens spent considerably more. In 1753 the author of a letter to the *Independent Reflector* in New York claimed that many families spent in excess of one-quarter of the value of their estates on a “proper” funeral.<sup>10</sup> By the 1760s in Boston so much money was lavished on funerals that some attendants declined gifts. “He was decently interred on Monday last: a great number of Persons attended the Funeral, which was in the new established Method ... those who have been chosen Bearers to the Remains of the Deceased to the Grave, have refused the usual Presents of Gloves, to prevent a needless Expense to the Surviving Relatives.”<sup>11</sup> “We hope those inhabitants of Philadelphia, whose fortunes will admit, and whose stations seem to require this expense, will begin this custom,” wrote the author of a letter published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1765, “especially when they consider how much their example will affect their inferiors, who are fond of supporting this outside grandeur, though conscious, at the same time, they will ere long want those seventy or hundred pounds they so foolishly lavish away, in this unnecessary conformity to fashion.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Sandwith Drinker and Elaine Forman Crane, *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), 2031.

<sup>9</sup> Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and the Family in England, 1480–1750* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 285; “Currency, Coinage and the Cost of Living,” *The Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, last modified 2013, <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org/static/Coinage.jsp>.

<sup>10</sup> “Of the Extravagance,” *Independent Reflector* (New York), June 14, 1753, 16; as referenced in Stephen C. Bullock and Sheila McIntyre, “The Handsome Tokens of a Funeral: Glove-Giving and the Large Funeral in Eighteenth-Century New England,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (April 2012): 305.

<sup>11</sup> Republished in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), November 29, 1764, [2]. The letter was dated Boston, November 15, [1764].

<sup>12</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), May 23, 1765, [3].

By the turn of the eighteenth century in Great Britain, nonheraldic funeral processions for middle-class Englishmen were fairly standardized. With roots dating back to at least the sixteenth century, the street procession had evolved into a largely secular ritual.<sup>13</sup> Some of the evidence for its form and practice may be found in the small woodcuts that are found on printed funeral invitations during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>14</sup> But foreign visitors also made reference to English custom. Henri Misson, a Swiss traveler, described a typical middle-class Anglican procession:

Every Thing being ready to move (it must be remember’d that I always speak of middling People, among whom the Custom of a Nation are most truly to be learn’d) one or more Beadles march first, each carrying a long Staff, at the end of which is a great Apple or Knob of Silver. The Minister of the Parish, generally accompany’d by some other Minister, and attended by the Clerk, walks next; and the Body carry’d as I said before, come just after him. The Relations in close Mourning, and all the guests two by two, make up the rest of the Procession.<sup>15</sup>

The beadle, a parish official, invited friends and relations to assemble at the house of the deceased; participants wore customary mourning clothing. The coffin was covered with a cloth called a pall. The color of clothing and coffin cover was determined by the age and marital status of the deceased. Heralded by tolling bells, six to eight men carried the coffin through the public streets and into the church where services were held. A popular satirical print, *The Repeal, or the Funeral Procession, of Miss Americ-Stamp*, likely shows another Anglican funeral cavalcade (fig. 1).<sup>16</sup> The child’s coffin represents the remains of the 1765 Stamp Act, repealed in less than a year after antitaxation protests by American colonists. The Reverend “Mr. Anti-Sejanus” (pseudonym used by Reverend W. Scott in letters to London’s *Public Advertiser* supporting the act) leads the procession as officiating minister, followed by other supporters, including the attorney general and solicitor general bearing flags representing the stamp design.

If the Anglican priest did not walk in the funeral procession—a more common practice after the

<sup>13</sup> Julian Litten, *The English Way of Death: The Common Funeral since 1450* (London: R. Hale, 1991), 155.

<sup>14</sup> Clare Gittings, *Death, Burial, and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 131.

<sup>15</sup> As quoted in Litten, *The English Way of Death*, 143.

<sup>16</sup> The artist Benjamin Wilson (1721–88) was commissioned to make this print to convince Parliament to repeal the Stamp Act. It was so popular that other print makers pirated it. This copy is unattributed.



Fig. 1. *The Repeal, or the Funeral Procession, of Miss Americ-Stamp*, ca. 1766. (John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.)

Reformation—he would meet the corpse at the entrance to the churchyard where the religious service prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer would begin.<sup>17</sup> Funeral processions for some dissenters would not have included clergy or parish officials at all. During the Commonwealth an engraving in a tract on the plague shows a Puritan procession where the coffin and its bearers lead a group of mourners in day dress.<sup>18</sup> Undertakers began to assume the business of conducting a funeral in the mid-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>19</sup> A growing middle class expanded the market for conspicuous public display. An early twentieth-century historian of British funeral customs sarcastically remarked: “The procession conducting the body to the grave has always offered a welcomed opportunity for the display of pomp, circumstance

and ostentatious grief, so prized by vulgar minds. The average man or woman can claim public attention only at marriage and burial, and on each of these occasions a nonentity becomes the center of attention in a ceremonial procession to and from the church.”<sup>20</sup>

Protestant funeral processions in the Middle American colonies before and just after independence followed much the same pattern. In the poem “Epitaph,” published in New York’s *Daily Advertiser* in 1791, its anonymous author referenced contemporary conventions in describing the missing elements in the funeral of a poor but honest man:

For him no hearse with sorrow’s weeds was hung,  
 No coach was hir’d, no parish bells were rung;  
 No multitude of mourners fill’d the road,  
 Three sons alone sustain’d their lonely load!  
 No christian brethren ventur’d to convene,  
 To grace the humble solitary scene;  
 No curate came through hackney’d forms to rave,  
 He barely got what must be had—a grave!

<sup>17</sup> Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England*, 136; Litten, *The English Way of Death*, 150.  
<sup>18</sup> Litten, *The English Way of Death*, 159.  
<sup>19</sup> Julie Rugg, “From Reason to Regulation, 1760–1850,” in *Death in England, an Illustrated History*, ed. Peter C. Gittings and Clare Gittings (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 222–23.

<sup>20</sup> Bertram S. Puckle, *Funeral Customs, Their Origin and Development* (London: T. W. Laurie, 1926), 112.



No face assumed the fashionable mask,  
 The very sexton seem'd to scorn his task.  
 Perhaps, you guess, he spurned the gospel scheme  
 And fear'd man's fall—a venerable dream.  
 But not for this we decent rites deny'd—  
 He was not worth a penny when he died;  
 We were not proffered a funeral feast,  
 Nor could his heirs have paid the prudent priest!<sup>21</sup>

The poor suffered the indignity of an inadequate farewell, lacking even clergy.

American funeral processions varied according to sect, but as in London, most were heralded by tolling bells. Elizabeth Drinker noted in Philadelphia that “the bell is tolling for some one going to their grave.”<sup>22</sup> American Protestant processions conforming to Church of England precedents were led by the officiating minister. The Drinkers participated in non-Quaker processions and at least on one occasion it began at their doorstep, as she noted that “the invitation to his funeral, was to meet at our house; the relations &c. with the Corpes [*sic*], stop'd at our door, at the time appointed, when Bishop White and the few others that were in waiting accompanyd them to the burying ground.”<sup>23</sup> She concluded that members of an African American procession in 1798 were nonconformists: “A Negro burying past our door going up town, in different order from any I have ever seen, six men went before the Coffin, one with a book in his hand, they sang aloud, psalms I suppose, in a very loud and discordant voice: a large concourse follow'd. Methodists, I take them to be.”<sup>24</sup>

Except for immediate family, participants attended by invitation (fig. 2).<sup>25</sup> By the 1780s–90s wealthy families might hire a horse-drawn hearse, and some churches purchased their own for the use of their members. Hearses then, like those today, were designed so that the coffin could be seen. For those who could afford it, a decent procession consisted of a set of acceptable behaviors such as those reported for Mrs. Susannah Mumford of Newport, Rhode Island, who died in 1792: “Her remains, attended by a numerous train of relatives and friends, and a large concourse of the inhabitants of the town, were yesterday evening carried to Trinity Church, and after the funeral rites were performed

<sup>21</sup> “Epitaph,” *Daily Advertiser* (New York), February 12, 1791, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Drinker and Crane, *Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, 1194.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 463.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 1043.

<sup>25</sup> The note in fig. 2 inviting William Thorn and family to a Quaker funeral in Bristol Township across from Trenton, NJ, shows that the practice of requiring funeral invitations continued into the nineteenth century.

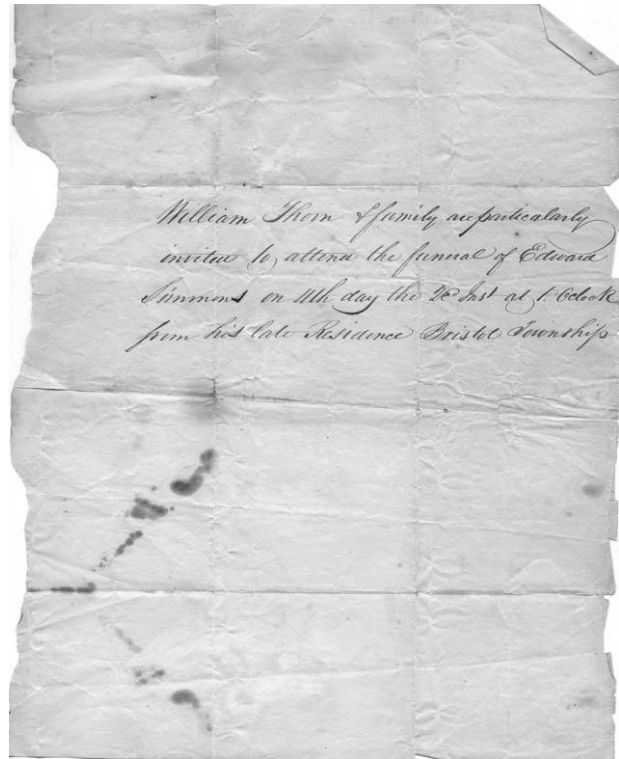


Fig. 2. Invitation for William Thorn and family to the funeral of Edward Simmons, Bristol Township, Pennsylvania, ca. 1800. (Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College.)

by the Rev. Mr. Smith, interred under the church, with every mark of decent and solemn respect.”<sup>26</sup> A significant turnout of invited mourners was an indicator of Mrs. Mumford’s status.

### Eighteenth-Century British and Mid-Atlantic Coffins

Except in extreme circumstances such as epidemics, coffins were always made to order until the nineteenth century. The traditional British coffin was made of English elm, which is waterproof and with a grain not prone to split.<sup>27</sup> Internal joints were sealed with pitch, and the bottom filled with bran or sawdust to absorb bodily fluids. Almost all of the documented English types in the period from 1650 to 1830 are variations of the flat-topped hexagonal box with single, double-lidded single, double, and triple cases.<sup>28</sup> The single type—just

<sup>26</sup> “Newport, August 13,” *Providence Gazette and Country Journal* (Providence, RI), August 25, 1792, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Litten, *The English Way of Death*, 90.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

the one box called the coffin—was the most common form for earthen burial. The triple—an inner wooden coffin, a lead shell, and outer wooden case—was usually mandated for vault burial, as the lead shell masked unpleasant odors. The outermost case, single or triple, was usually covered with fabric (upholstered) and decorated with elaborate fittings in a wide variety of patterns and styles. “Miss Americ-Stamp” (see fig. 1) pictures a high-end child’s coffin of the period: covered in cloth and decorated around the edges with upholstery nails, it is topped with a coffin plate that would have been engraved with the name of the deceased.

By 1700 most Londoners were buried in the common hexagonal container, angled or “kerfed” at the shoulders and flat-lidded, a form that evolved by 1675 from a four-sided box in the shape of an isosceles trapezoid with an A-shaped or gabled lid, its sides tapering toward the feet.<sup>29</sup> In some areas of England the intermediate form comprising a hexagonal coffin with a gabled lid may have coexisted in the mid-seventeenth century with the flat-lidded one.<sup>30</sup>

The purchase ledger of Richard Carpenter, undertaker of London, reveals the range of styles and accessories available to aristocrats and wealthy commoners alike.<sup>31</sup> Between 1746 and 1747 Carpenter contracted with twenty-eight different craftsmen who supplied gloves, cloth, coffin plate, nails, heraldic paintings, sheet and manufactured lead and solder, ostrich feathers, engraving, and—with two joiners at the same time—coffins. The Earl of Darnley’s estate paid Carpenter over £60 for heraldic work alone in the summer of 1747. Coffin plate came in a wide variety of gilt, silvered, brass, or lead. Carpenter offered single- or double-lidded containers, many including an additional case. Some orders incorporated a lead shell that was soldered

closed—by the plumber or lead worker who made it—after the body had been placed inside. An invoice for the 1764 funeral of Mrs. Mary Hasmore from St. Dunstan’s West in Fleet Street, copied in Carpenter’s account book, reveals that nonheraldic funerals were nonetheless elaborate (fig. 3).<sup>32</sup> The bill for £26.16.7 included feathers and velvets. In fact, the cost of the coffin with plate and handles was only about one-fourth of the total.

Archaeological investigations of Anglican burial grounds in England conducted in the past thirty years have provided further information on coffin types. A mid-1980s excavation in the vaults of Christ Church Spitalfields, an Anglican church in East London, reveals that the “full complement of coffin furniture for an 18th century coffin consisted of one to three rows of domed-headed nails, that served to form a decorative adornment on an outer-cloth covering; four pairs of handles and grips (only three pairs were generally used for a child) three on each side and one at each end. Each handle was complemented by the addition of a decorative plate (grip plate) that fitted behind the handle itself. It was pierced and held in position by the handle fittings.”<sup>33</sup> Additional decoration included escutcheons (drops), nail lace (fine metal trim, occasionally preferred to the double row of decorative nails), breastplate (with inscription), and two lid ornaments (supplied in pairs). The breastplate, lid ornaments, and grip plates were normally sold as sets. The Spitalfields report also indicates that “Although the handles were fixed so that they were free to move in these mountings, it is unlikely that they would have been used to take the weight as the coffin was carried on the shoulders of bearers.”<sup>34</sup> Small tacks secured fabric to the outermost case before the coffin was assembled, and afterward decorative nails “were generally applied in two to three rows, shoulder to shoulder ‘close drove’ approximately 2,000 per adult coffin along the edges of the coffin lid and sides.”<sup>35</sup> The fabric itself was commonly wool, and its color varied according to the status of the deceased, from white or light gray for children to black for adults.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>30</sup> The Parish coffin of Easingwold in Yorkshire dates from about 1650 and is hexagonal in shape; its top is made up of two boards that come together in the center forming a low gable (ibid., pl. 11). Antiquarian literature in England suggests that this form may have persisted into the nineteenth century in parts of Devonshire and in the north among the “farmers and poorer classes.” *The Stirling Antiquary* (reprint from *The Stirling Sentinel*), vol. 2 (1888–93; repr., Stirling, Scotland: Cook & Wylie, 1900), 290. In *Martin’s Hundred* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), Ivor Noël Hume theorized that the use of the gabled lid in England may have been originally intended to display the pall—with its heraldic imagery—to better advantage, but Litten contends that it is most likely related to the fact that the arms of the corpse were traditionally folded on the groin—and in the early, tapered coffin, the raised lid provided room for the hands (*The English Way of Death*, 90).

<sup>31</sup> Mr. Richard Carpenter, Purchase ledger and sundry accounts, 1746–47/1761–63, and 1778, MS 5871, Guildhall Library, Manuscripts Section, London. Carpenter (ca. 1725–78) was an undertaker with a shop in Fleet Market in London.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., n.p.

<sup>33</sup> M. L. Bowis, *Complementary Historical Report for the Excavation of the Private and Parochial Vaults at Christ Church and All Saints, Spitalfields, 1985*, [15], [http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-345-1/dissemination/pdf/hist\\_report.pdf](http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-345-1/dissemination/pdf/hist_report.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., [22].

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., [30].

<sup>36</sup> Margaret Cox, *Life and Death in Spitalfields, 1700 to 1850* (York: Council for British Archaeology, 1996), 102.

L		M	
10.00	To 59-18-19 Ld. 8th Good with Cloth over same all round a Totted Lid in the Corner of Lid a Double Lid plate	6.00	3 14
7.00	To 4 pair of Large Copper Shells 9 1/2 Ld of Lead	1.15.0	1 2
4.00	To 2 Men to Move Coffin from North Room	8.00	8
3.00	To Lead plate a weighing p. for the Lid of the Coffin	2.00	2
10.00	To 4 Men taking Minutes at Burial	11.00	7 8
5.00	To 4 Men taking Minutes at Burial	4.00	4
3.00	To 4 Men taking Minutes at Burial	4.00	4
8.00	To 5 Gentlemen Clocks	0.5.0	3 4
11.00	To 5 Men Gray hatbands &c	0.12.6	13 4
8.00	To 1 white hatband Minister	0.7.6	6
4.00	To Cash gave the Clerk by order	0.5.0	5
12.00	To 5 Mens Lace hgd	1.0.0	16 3
7.00	To 5 Womens &c	1.5.0	1 2 6
10.00	To 2 Hatbands of 2000 with steel scaps & cover	0.11.0	2 6
16.00	To 2 hats 2 pair of gloves &c	0.6.0	5
13.00	To 2 Horses & 2 horses - to St Dunston	0.18.0	18
14.00	To 2 Beavers	1.15.0	1 7 6
8.00	To 2 Beavers	1.0.0	10
	To 6 papers to attend the hearse with caps & drapery	1.6.0	9
	To 2 Mourning Couches	0.18.0	2 6
	To 4 papers to attend the Couches & hatbands & gloves	1.00	10
	To the use of 3 Coachmen Clocks	0.3.0	6
	To 3 hatbands 3 pair gloves &c	0.9.0	6
	To Beethoven's Carriage Lid & hatbands & gloves	0.3.0	4
	To Minors attend the Burial	0.2.6	2 6
	To Cash paid parish fees of St Dunston in Oct	3.00	3 0
	To Cash paid Mrs Beer	0.3.0	3 0
	To an Affidavit	0.1.0	1 0
	To carrying Coffin home	0.0.8	8
		26.16.7	

Fig. 3. Invoice for 1764 funeral of Mrs. Mary Hasmore [Hazmor], London, copied in Account Book of Richard Carpenter, 1764. (CLC/B/227/MS05871, London Metropolitan Archive, City of London.)

A more recent excavation on the site of another Anglican church, St. Luke's, north of the City of London in Islington, unearthed a total of 1,053 burials in the northern and southern churchyards as well as in the crypt under the main structure.<sup>37</sup> Located in an area dominated by the London watchmaking trade in the eighteenth century, burials dated primarily between 1755 and 1848 and peaked from 1790 to 1820.<sup>38</sup> Coffin types ranged from triple-shell constructions, heavily adorned and including a case, to simple wooden coffins; the latter

<sup>37</sup> Angela Boyle, Ceridwen Boston, and Annsophie Witkin, "The Archaeological Experience at St. Luke's Church, Old Street, Islington," project report, Oxford Archaeological Unit, Ltd., 2005, 13. The excavation was conducted preceding the refurbishment of an abandoned church.

<sup>38</sup> Angela Boyle, "The Documented History of the Parish and Burial Ground," in Boyle, Boston, and Witkin, "The Archaeological Experience at St. Luke's Church," 25-54.

were found more frequently in the least desirable location at the back of the yard. Lead shells were found in some vault and earthen interments dating from before 1800. Coffin fittings recovered included from one to four individual coffin plates, lid motifs, escutcheons, grips, and grip plates. Metal studs were applied to the outermost case in decorative patterns.<sup>39</sup>

The four-sided, trapezoid-shaped coffin that was common in England until the 1670s appears to have disappeared from America at about the same time. Archaeologist Noël Hume discovered four-sided, gable-lidded coffins at Martin's Hundred, Virginia, dating from the first quarter of the seventeenth century.<sup>40</sup> The isolated grave of Captain Bartholomew Gosnold, who died in 1607 in Jamestown, was also in the earlier style.<sup>41</sup> But by the end of the seventeenth century, the hexagonal form was in widespread use in the colonies.<sup>42</sup> In his excavation of a Catholic cemetery at St. Mary's City that was used by English immigrants from approximately 1638 until 1730, Timothy Riordan found seven coffin types, including three with gabled lids: tapered (trapezoid), hexagonal with a straight gabled lid (two boards), and hexagonal with a diamondback gabled lid (four boards).<sup>43</sup> Although it is a small sample, by 1700 all of the coffin types at St. Mary's were hexagonal. In the Walton burial ground in Griswold, Connecticut, used between 1757 and the early nineteenth century, all of the adult burials were in hexagonal coffins.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Ceriwen Boston and Angela Boyle, "Burial Practice and Material Culture," in Boyle, Boston, and Witkin, "The Archaeological Experience at St. Luke's Church," 82-101.

<sup>40</sup> See Hume, *Martin's Hundred*, 308-12.

<sup>41</sup> "A Highly Unusual Case," Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, Anthropology.si.edu/writteninbone/unusual\_case.html.

<sup>42</sup> An excellent discussion of coffin construction and types used in the Middle Atlantic area is found in Timothy B. Riordan, "Carry Me to Yon Kirk Yard": An Investigation of Changing Burial Practices in the Seventeenth Century Cemetery at St. Mary's City, Maryland," *Historical Archaeology* 43, no. 1 (2009): 81-92. For other eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century cemetery excavations in the United States, see Charles H. LeeDecker, "The Coffin Maker's Craft: Treatment of the Dead in Rural Eighteenth-Century Delaware," *Journal of Middle Atlantic Archaeology* 17 (2001): 1-14, and "Preparing for an Afterlife on Earth: The Transformation of Mortuary Behavior in Nineteenth-Century North America," in *International Handbook of Historical Archaeology*, ed. T. Majewski and D. Gaimster (New York: Springer, 2009).

<sup>43</sup> Riordan, "Carry Me to Yon Kirk Yard," 87.

<sup>44</sup> Nicholas F. Bellantoni, Paul S. Sledzik, and David A. Poirier, "Rescue, Research, and Reburial: Walton Family Cemetery, Griswold, Connecticut," in *In Remembrance: Archaeology and Death*, ed. David A. Poirier and Nicholas F. Bellantoni (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1997), 137. Many of the children were buried in rectangular coffins. Placement of nails in one older adult male coffin, no. 15, may indicate a ridged hexagonal form, but the evidence is inconclusive.



Fig. 4. Paul Revere, engraver, "the unhappy victims who fell in the bloody [Boston] Massacre," 1770. Woodcut. From *Boston Gazette and Daily Journal*, March 12, 1770, 1. (LC-USZ62-45586, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.)

Pictorial and archival evidence from New England and New York also references the hexagonal form in the eighteenth century. In 1770 Paul Revere engraved four flat-topped hexagonal coffins with breastplates and lid ornaments to symbolize the victims that fell at Bunker Hill (fig. 4).<sup>45</sup> That same year Ezekiel Russell printed an image of the coffin of the Reverend George Whitefield on the cover of "A Poem, by Phillis, a Negro Girl, in Boston" (fig. 5). This print shows the double row of nails, escutcheon, handles, and breastplate that adorned a high-end coffin in Boston. Entries in the daybook

<sup>45</sup> Paul Revere often did woodcuts for the *Boston Gazette and Daily Journal*. For its account of the funeral for the victims of the Boston Massacre, he supplied this image of four coffins with the initials of the dead men atop each one.

of New York Quaker joiner and merchant Joshua Delaplaine (1690–1771) from 1753 to 1756 illustrate the scope of a business that included coffin making.<sup>46</sup> Like many merchant-craftsmen, he dealt in hardware and raw materials, contracted with others for labor and supplies, and made furniture and coffins. At least one-quarter of his work during this period was of the latter and for a primarily non-Quaker clientele at a wide range of income levels. The bulk of the orders were simply described as coffins, priced consistently at eleven shillings for adults and five for children. More expensive models

<sup>46</sup> Joshua Delaplaine Daybook and Business Papers, 1720–79, 1815–17, in Delaplaine Family Papers, 1721–1810, original in New-York Historical Society, microfilm Joseph Downs Collection, Winterthur Library.



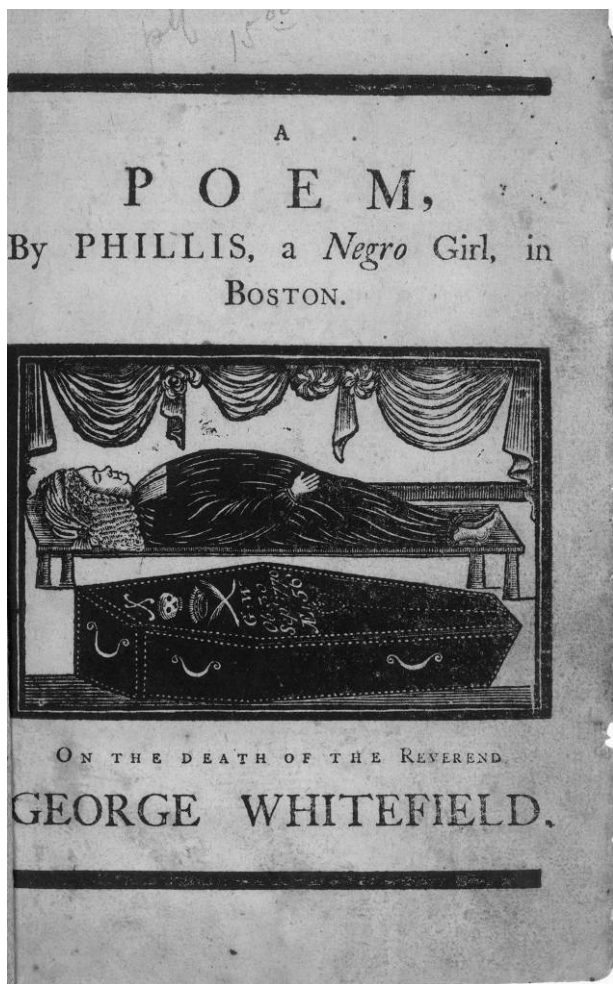


Fig. 5. Cover, “A Poem, by Phillis, a Negro Girl, in Boston, On the Death of the Reverend George Whitefield,” ca. 1770. Printed and sold by Ezekiel Russell and John Boyles, Boston. (John Carter Brown Library, Brown University.)

were of sweet gum (“bilstel”), the adults’ ranging in cost from £1.5.0 for “plaine” to £5 for “coverd full trimmed and lined with Sasinet [sarcenet].”<sup>47</sup> He did not bill separately for coffin plate but recorded regular purchases of handles from suppliers. Although he made chairs and tables of mahogany as early as 1753, none of his coffins were of that material. Lewis Morris of Morrisiana commissioned him to construct a walnut coffin for his mother, Isabella: “I would have it made of Black walnut but Not covered, but Lined with white calico, upon the Top of the coffin should be putt in white Nails the following Letters IM Dyed the 30th Day of March 1752 aged

<sup>47</sup> “Thomas Pope to a plaine bilstid coffin for his mother,” no month/day, 1753, n.p., Delaplaine Daybook; “Abraham Lodge to a coffin for his wife being covered full trimmed & lined with Sasinet £5-,” [January 17?], 1754, n.p., Delaplaine Daybook.

79.”<sup>48</sup> Like his counterparts in London, Delaplaine also produced upholstered cases for wealthy clients.

Upholstered cases and coffins were also sold in Charleston, South Carolina. Bradford L. Rauschenberg found documentation of a “black cov’d cedar coffin” in account books there before 1775.<sup>49</sup> Native cedar was the most common coffin wood in Charleston until the end of the eighteenth century; cypress was more frequently used for slaves. The former, resistant to rot, decay, and insects, did not take solid stains well, and the use of fabric and decorative nailing in the English style undoubtedly provided a more elegant appearance. Black paint may have provided a more affordable alternative to upholstery.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, Philadelphia area carpenters and joiners advertised coffins with both flat and gabled tops. The account book of John Head, Philadelphia joiner, provides early evidence of the construction of coffins in that city from the year after his emigration in 1717 until 1743.<sup>50</sup> Head made more than 65 coffins as well as furniture and engaged in a wide variety of interrelated mercantile activities. His coffins were available in a wide variety of materials and priced accordingly, from pine or “Pine Coffin Blact,”—painted black—to at least six of the more expensive walnut.<sup>51</sup> Among the most expensive of Head’s coffins in the 1720s was a peculiar construction described as “ridg’d,” with those for adults priced at £2.5.0. These were undoubtedly hexagonal, given the context and cost of construction, but also incorporated the earlier ridged or gabled top, such as the coffin depicted in “Sickness is come and death draws nigh,” an emblem published in Quaker schoolmaster Benjamin Sands’s 1787 puzzle book, *Metamorphosis* (fig. 6).<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> A. L. S., Lewis Morris to Mr. Joshua Delaplaine, March 30, 1752, Delaplaine Family Papers, 1721–1810, original in New-York Historical Society, microfilm Joseph Downs Collection, Winterthur Library. A note on the top of the letter indicates that it is a copy, the original given to Lewis G. Morris, Morrisiana, n.d.

<sup>49</sup> Bradford L. Rauschenberg, “Coffin Making and Undertaking in Charleston and Its Environs, 1705–1820,” *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts* 16 (May 1990): 35.

<sup>50</sup> John Head Account Book, 1718–53, George Vaux Papers, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia. See also Jay Robert Stiefel, “Philadelphia Cabinetmaking and Commerce, 1718–53: The Account Book of John Head, Joiner,” *Bulletin of the American Philosophical Society Library* 1 (Winter 2001), <http://www.amphilsoc.org/bulletin/20011/head.htm>.

<sup>51</sup> John Head Account Book, n.p. Head bought and sold “payers” [pairs] of coffin handles and coffin screws, sometimes in exchange for goods and services.

<sup>52</sup> Sands was a Quaker schoolmaster from Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

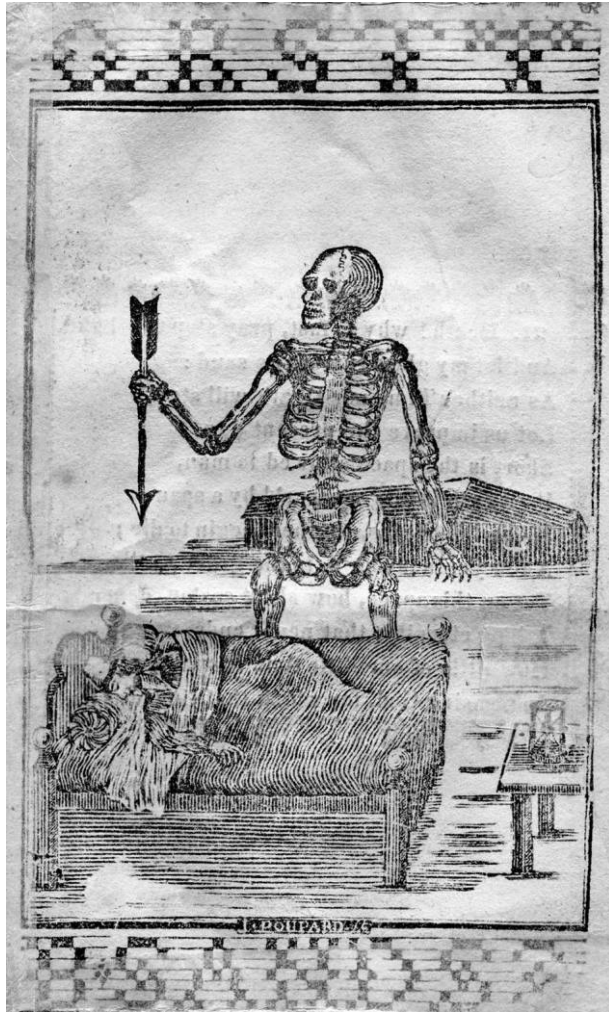


Fig. 6. James Poupard, engraver, "Sickness is come and death draws nigh," ca. 1787. From Benjamin Sands, *Metamorphosis or A Transformation of Pictures with Poetical Explanations for the Amusement of Young Persons* (New York: Samuel Wood & Sons, 1827), n.p. (Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College.)

These gabled hexagonal coffins were comparatively expensive because they were more difficult to construct. In 1760 John Hill of Philadelphia advertised "ready-made Coffins, with Ridged or Flat Tops, and Silvered or plain Furniture—Also low priced Ditto."<sup>53</sup> Until this time other Philadelphia area joiners and general carpenters were still producing ridged black walnut and poplar coffins.<sup>54</sup> In his general carpentry work from at least 1746 to

<sup>53</sup> "JOHN HILL, Joiner, Near JOSEPH TROTTER, in Second street, Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), June 12, 1760: [3].

<sup>54</sup> John Taylor, *His Book of Acoumpts* [sic], 1746–72, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA; William Smedley Account Book, 1728–66, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.

1772, including "joyner work" and repairs, Chester County carpenter John Taylor debited thirty-one coffins between 1747 and 1758.<sup>55</sup> Among the most costly was a "Black Walnut Ridg Coffin" with four handles at £1.14.0 for James Sharpless's daughter Mary in 1758.<sup>56</sup> Walnut ridged coffins for adults at £1.10.0 cost more than flat (fig. 7). From two to six handles added one shilling each to the final bill, but most of his coffins did not have handles. Black walnut coffins were usually about fifteen shillings more than similar ones in the less expensive wood like the "flat poplar coffin for another poor man."<sup>57</sup> William Smedley, who also worked in Chester County, produced fewer ridged coffins, but they were his most expensive models. His account book dates from 1728 to 1766, but the last "Black Walnut Ridg Coffin" he made was in 1760; it had six handles, and he billed the estate of widow Ruth Wharbutton for £2.5.0.<sup>58</sup> Neither Head nor Taylor nor Smedley billed their clients for coffin cases.

After 1760, however, I have not been able to find gable-topped coffins advertised in the Philadelphia area. Amos Darlington of West Chester, Pennsylvania, working between 1764 and 1828, made many coffins, but none of these was listed as gable-topped or "ridged"; his most expensive were of mahogany.<sup>59</sup> When *The Journeymen Cabinet and Chair-Makers Philadelphia Book of Prices* was published in 1795, size, choice of wood, and exterior decoration were the only determinants of cost, and ridged tops were not mentioned as an option.<sup>60</sup> In July of 1779 David Evans, a cabinetmaker who worked in Philadelphia until 1811, debited the estate of prominent lawyer George Ross, who was interred at Christ Church, for a "Mahogany Coffin, inscription plate, handles & case" for £175.<sup>61</sup> By 1792 Colonel Richard Fullerton's family laid him to rest in the First Presbyterian Church burial ground in a coffin

<sup>55</sup> Taylor's account book includes entries for a variety of joinery and carpenter's work. Most of his clients lived in Nether Providence, Pennsylvania, but he also worked in Caln and Thornbury.

<sup>56</sup> John Taylor, *His Book of Acoumpts*, [April 22], 1758.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, n.d.

<sup>58</sup> William Smedley Account Book, [December 9], 1760, "to making a Black Walnut Ridg Coffin with Six handles for Ruth Wharbutton 2-5-0." Almost a year earlier, Ruth Wharbutton had ordered a similar coffin at the same price for her husband.

<sup>59</sup> Amos Darlington Account Book, 1764–1828, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA.

<sup>60</sup> *The Journeymen Cabinet and Chair-Makers Philadelphia Book of Prices* (Philadelphia: Ormrod & Conrad, 1795), 78–79.

<sup>61</sup> "Excerpts from the Day-Books of David Evans, Cabinet-Maker, Philadelphia, 1774–1811," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 27, no. 1 (1903): 49. Payment was presumably made in Continental currency.

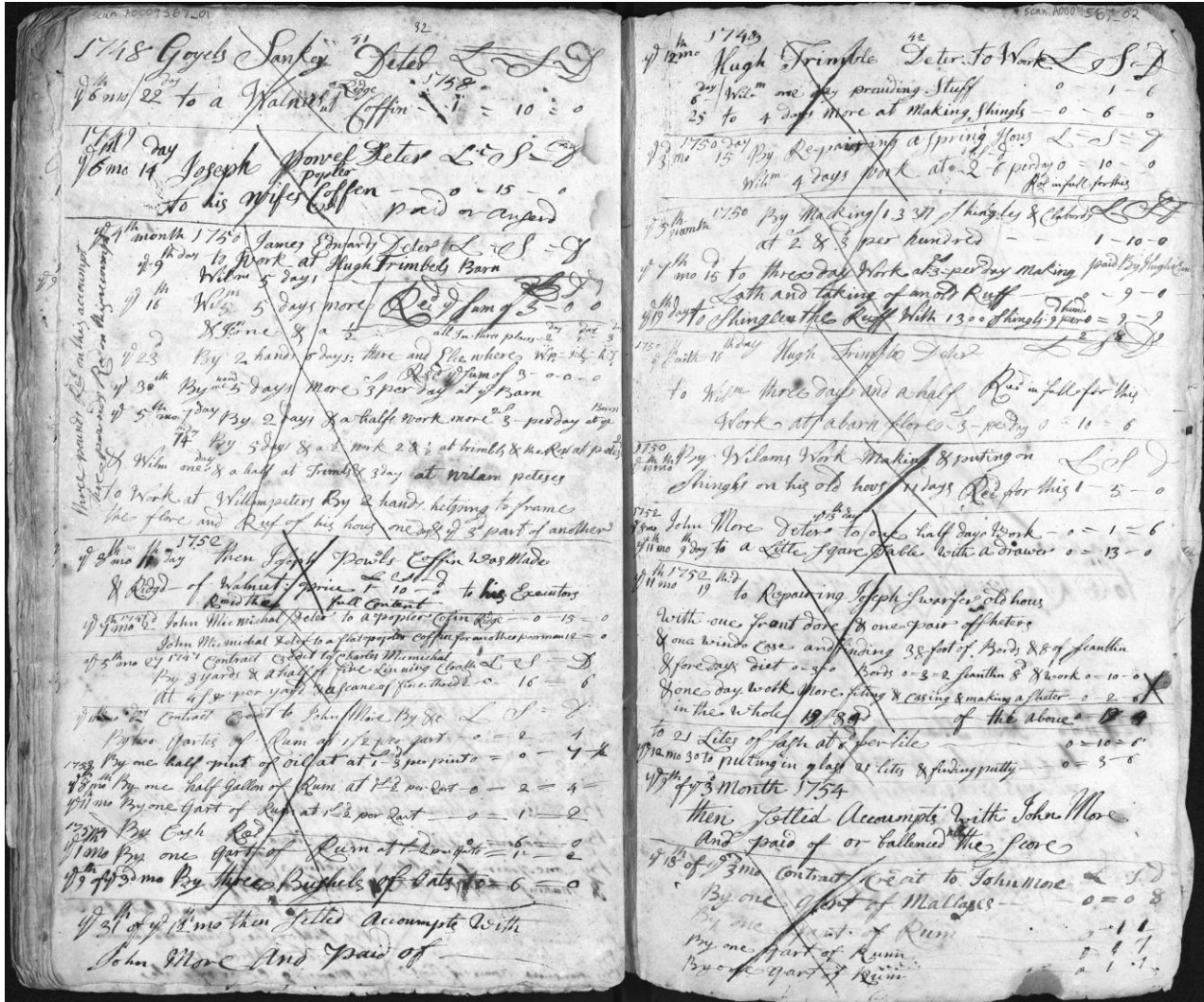


Fig. 7. Page showing price for walnut ridged coffin (top left), 1758, and for a flat poplar coffin for “another poor man” (center left), 1747. From John Taylor, His Book of Acoumpts [sic], 1746–72. (Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College.)

“covered in cloth, lined, inscription plates and handles,” which Evans provided for a price of £14.<sup>62</sup> This description was similar to the type provided to the elites in London, New York, and Charleston.

The Meeting House and the World

The Society of Friends originated in England in the mid-seventeenth century as “a culmination to and a reaction against the Protestant Reformation.”<sup>63</sup> George Fox (1624–91), its founder, began to preach publicly in 1647. Central to the Society of Friends

is the experience of the Inward Light of Christ, and living as a Quaker means following one’s Inward Monitor, rather than external rules.<sup>64</sup> Friends believe in the “priesthood of all believers” and in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had no ordained clergy, creed, or formal set of beliefs.

Within the Society of Friends, the highest level of organization is the yearly meeting. The structure of this assembly began to take shape in the 1660s. Annual gatherings convened in London and thereafter issued epistles that contained advices concerning behavior of members of the Society of Friends. The first General Meeting of Friends in America

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 52.  
<sup>63</sup> Hugh Barbour and J. W. Frost, *The Quakers* (New York: Greenwood, 1988), 4.

<sup>64</sup> J. William Frost, “From Plainness to Simplicity: Changing Quaker Ideals for Material Culture,” in Lapsansky and Verplanck, *Quaker Aesthetics*, 17.

was held in Rhode Island in 1661. Philadelphia Yearly Meeting opened its annual meeting at Burlington, New Jersey, in 1681. Though London Yearly Meeting clearly exerted considerable influence, each body operated independently. Lay ministers, officially acknowledged for their gift of vocal ministry and the soundness of their spiritual insight, traveled among the yearly meetings, visited families, facilitated communication at all levels, and preached at meetings for worship. A rare circa 1765 interior view of a meeting for worship in London's Gracechurch Street meeting house shows the close bonds between Friends in the home country and Atlantic colonies (fig. 8). English minister Isaac Sharples (1702?–84) stands at center preparing to speak, while Philadelphians Nicholas Waln (1742–1813) and Samuel Emlen (1730–99), who had traveled to Britain with certificates from Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, sit in the facing benches typically reserved for ministers and elders.<sup>65</sup>

Before the mid-eighteenth century the advices and recommendations of each yearly meeting were gathered into what was referred to as its “discipline” (fig. 9).<sup>66</sup> This document was cumulative, first manuscript and then printed, differing little in content and form from yearly meeting to yearly meeting. It was reissued about every twenty years, and intervening changes were added as approved by the yearly meeting. Copies of the discipline were available in the local meeting house and would have circulated among its members.

Beginning in the seventeenth century, each yearly meeting also approved a set of “queries,” questions that were read in meetings to encourage members to reflect on their own and their community's adherence to the Light. In 1747, for instance, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's sixth query inquired: “Are friends carefull [*sic*] to train up their Children, in the Nurture and fear of the Lord, and to Restrain them from Vice and Evil Company, and to keep them to plainness of speech and apparriell [*sic*].”<sup>67</sup>

But the disciplines and queries contained broad guidelines, not detailed, specific rules. Individuals

were expected to take personal responsibility for their own spiritual development. Individual members' responses and adherence to Quaker testimonies varied over a fairly wide spectrum, from that of ministers and elders, who were expected to set an example, to that of members whose behavior was becoming almost indistinguishable from that of their non-Quaker neighbors.

At the local level, elders like David Cooper of Woodbury Meeting, whose scolding letter to bereaved parents about their child's funeral is quoted above, guided behavior through regular family visits and conversations “out of doors.”<sup>68</sup> Deviations from the plainness testimony when not associated with a more serious offense would have been dealt with at this level, and Quakers would be encouraged to reexamine their actions. However, when a member was reported to have committed an offense that was clearly contrary to the good order of Friends—such as debt or fornication, which brought shame upon the reputation of the Society of Friends, or marrying outside of the faith, which threatened the integrity of the meeting—that person was interviewed by a committee of the monthly meeting that would recommend either a written acknowledgment of his or her transgression to the meeting or disownment. Common to many disownment documents of the eighteenth century was the phrase “for the honour of Truth and the reputation of our Society.” Letters of disownment involving public scandal were posted or read openly.

The Quaker population of Great Britain was never large. Between 1663 and 1700, when the average population of the country was over 5 million, members of the Society of Friends numbered 40,000. By 1750, when the general population had nearly doubled, the numbers of Quakers had declined to 30,000, roughly .3 percent.<sup>69</sup> This was due in part to emigration. In Pennsylvania members of the Society of Friends constituted 15.3 percent of the population in 1776, third in number behind Presbyterian and German Reform church members.<sup>70</sup> A hand-drawn map shows that by the end of the eighteenth century there were many Quaker meeting houses

<sup>65</sup> Worship was scheduled here twice a week. This meeting house was largely rebuilt in 1774 and was destroyed by fire in 1821. Samuel Emlen was given a certificate by the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting to Friends at Bristol in April of 1764; while not traveling as a minister, it was noted in the recommendation that he had appeared in public testimony and had been well received. Waln was in England on business.

<sup>66</sup> Henry Reynolds acquired this volume in 1764. It would have circulated among local meeting members at least until the next major revision, also in manuscript form, in 1747.

<sup>67</sup> Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, [Discipline], 1719. The queries for the year 1747 were copied at the back of Chesterfield Monthly Meeting's superseded discipline.

<sup>68</sup> Nathaniel Luff, *Journal of the Life of Nathaniel Luff, M.D.* (New York: Clark & Sickels, 1848), 169. “Out of doors” was a common expression among Friends referring to matters of disciplinary concern that were not considered by meeting for business—for a variety of reasons—but were handled more informally by elders. The monthly business meetings were made up of Friends who worshipped in several different meeting houses in a given geographic area.

<sup>69</sup> Hanbury Hankin, *Common Sense and Its Cultivation* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1926), 266.

<sup>70</sup> Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, “American Religion in 1776: A Statistical Portrait in Sociological Analysis,” *Sociology of Religion* 49, no. 1 (Spring 1988), table 3.





Fig. 8. *Gracechurch Street Meeting, London, ca. 1765*. Oil on board. (© Religious Society of Friends [Quakers] in Britain.)

in the area (fig. 10).<sup>71</sup> In the Middle Atlantic region, Pennsylvania was proportionally surpassed by New Jersey (15.5 percent) and Delaware (19.4 percent).<sup>72</sup> Elsewhere North Carolina, Georgia, and Rhode Island had statistically significant Quaker populations on the eve of the Revolution.

A concern that overall standards and adherence to the testimonies within the Society of Friends were eroding led to the rise of a small but powerful group of reformers within the Society of Friends in Philadelphia and London after 1755. These reformers attempted to create a sectarian buttress against the temptations of the world by strengthening and reinforcing distinctiveness.<sup>73</sup> They called

<sup>71</sup> This map marks the distance between individual Quaker meeting houses and may have been drawn for use by a traveling minister.

<sup>72</sup> Stark and Finke, "American Religion in 1776," 47.

<sup>73</sup> Jack D. Marietta, *The Reformation of American Quakerism, 1748–1783* (1984; repr. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), xi.

for "primitive purity" and collective witness.<sup>74</sup> In Britain, one element of the former was a reemphasis on plain dress and speech, heightening the hedge between themselves and the "world."<sup>75</sup> The caricature, *A Sailor at a Quaker's Funeral*, poked fun at Friends' sober demeanor "this side of the Grave" (fig. 11).<sup>76</sup> The clothing worn by the Quakers on the left side of the image contrasts starkly in its drab solid colors and lack of accessories with that of the non-Quakers on the right.

Quakers in the Middle Atlantic Colonies saw a decline in their political power and increasing social heterogeneity. By 1760, Philadelphia Yearly

<sup>74</sup> Thomas D. Hamm, *The Quakers in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 32.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>76</sup> Isaac Cruikshank (1764–1811) was a Scottish artist and caricaturist who worked in London for most of his career and frequently collaborated with George M. Woodward, a printmaker; both were known for social and political satire.



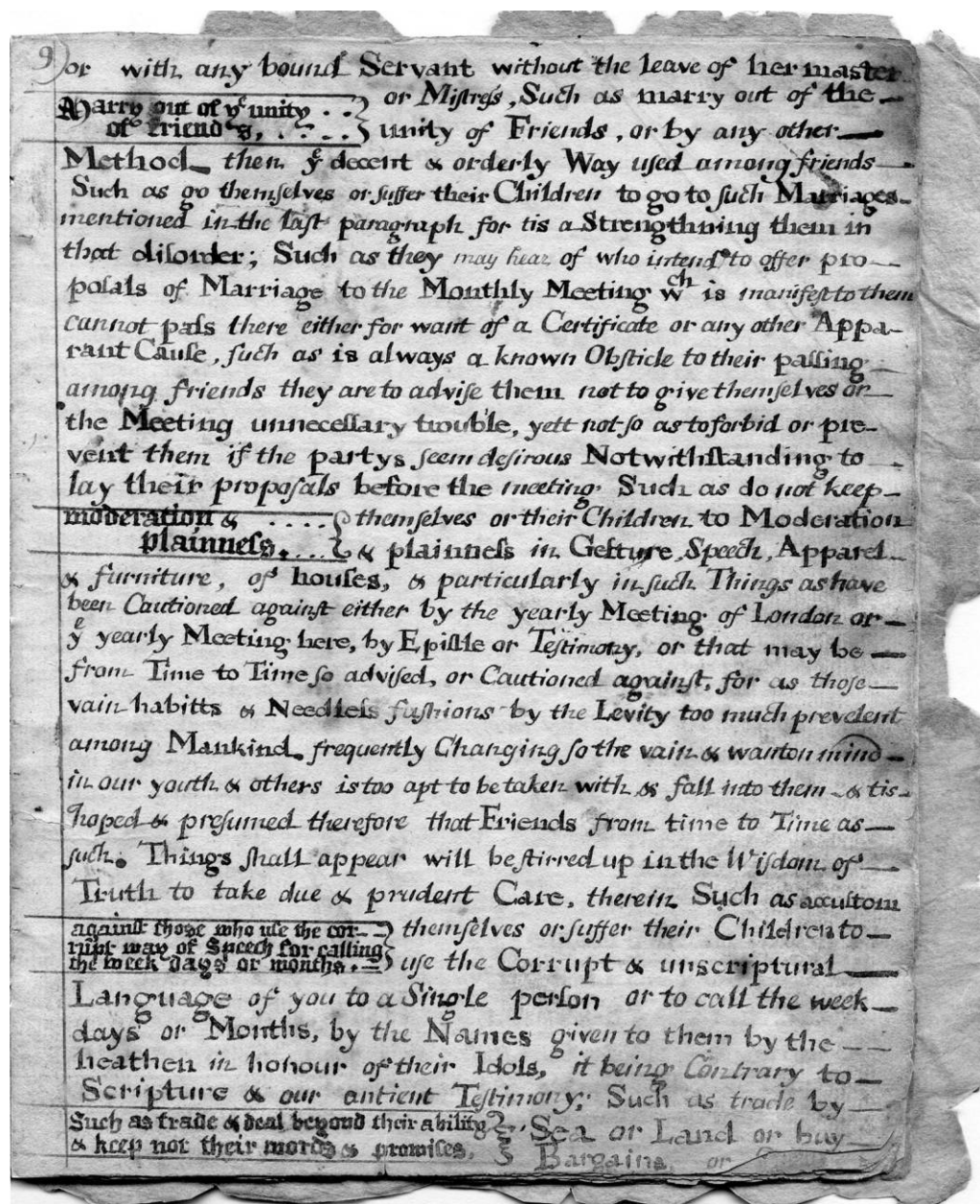


Fig. 9. "Moderation & Plainness," 1719. From a manuscript discipline of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, 1719. (Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College.)

Meeting had become extremely self-conscious and attempted "by discipline and publications to distinguish itself" both from apostates and from the wider non-Quaker population.<sup>77</sup> A sharp increase in the number of disownments called attention to those who self-identified as Quakers but did not consistently maintain their values, bringing discredit to the Society. The colonies as well saw a reemphasis on the peculiar dress and speech of Quakers. This

hedge is symbolically manifested in the brick wall shielding from public view the Friends Meeting House and Academy at the southeast corner of Fourth and Chestnut Streets in Philadelphia in the 1780s (fig. 12).<sup>78</sup> The Quaker men's long coats and

<sup>78</sup> The Library Company's copy identifies J. P[emberton?], W. Waring, J. Evans, Robert Proud, [Jam?]es Pemberton, Nick Waln, and Thomas Morris. This meeting house was built in 1764 and razed in 1859. Nicholas Waln is the same Quaker minister pictured in the lithograph of the Gracechurch Friends Meeting House, London (fig. 8).

<sup>77</sup> Marietta, *The Reformation of American Quakerism*, 225.

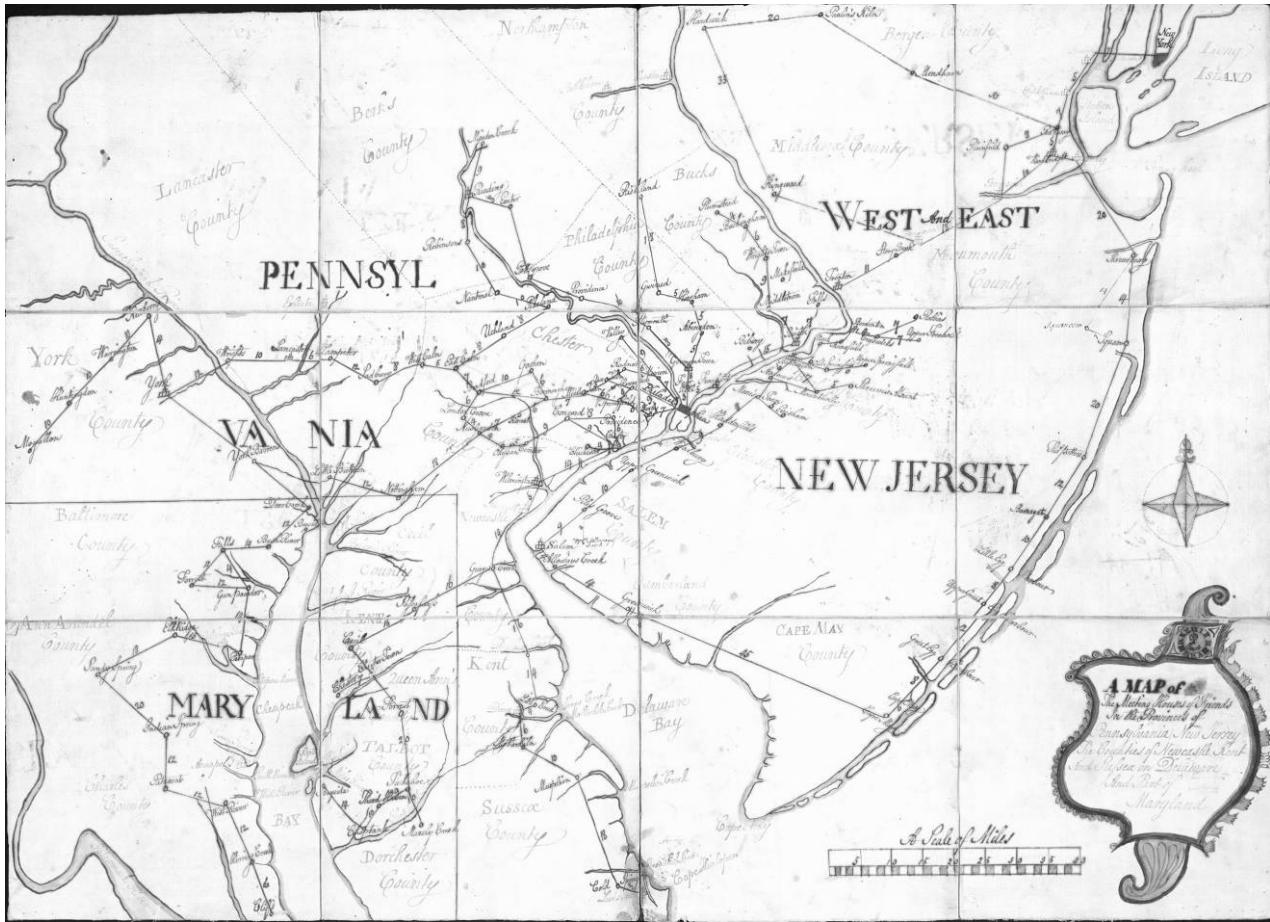


Fig. 10. A Map of the Meeting Houses of Friends in the Provinces of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, the Counties of Newcastle, Kent, and Sussex on Delaware and Part of Maryland, late eighteenth century. (Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College.)

wide-brimmed hats likewise mark them as different from the other figures. In the lower right corner of the print a Quaker in undyed coat and hat (in protest against the use of slave-produced goods such as indigo) comes face-to-face with a man in very high-style clothing. In a later version published as a cabinet card by Isaac G. Tyson, the latter is identified as Benjamin Chew (1722–1810), a member of the Society of Friends at birth who had been disowned for taking and administering an oath in 1744.<sup>79</sup> Quakers objected to oaths for a number of reasons, including the fact that they were clearly forbidden in Scripture.

### Implementing the Quaker Plainness Testimony

The fundamental Quaker testimonies are truthfulness, equality, peace, and simplicity. The practice of

plainness, historically related to simplicity, was marked by both moderation and utility—not merely the absence of ornament but also the presence of function. London Yearly Meeting of 1691 cautioned that “Friends take care to keep to plainness in ye Language and Habbits.”<sup>80</sup> In 1719, the London Yearly Meeting issued “An Epistle of Caution against Pride” that contrasted Quakers’ useful and serviceable objects with vain and foolish worldly fashions, such as extravagant wigs and gaudy and costly apparel and accessories adopted by non-Quakers (fig. 13). That same year Andrew Bradford in Philadelphia reprinted this comprehensive document, and copies were distributed to all Quaker meetings in the region. Quakers struggled inwardly with the public manifestation of their testimonies. Believers were led by the Inner Light to a public expression of the testimony of plainness. However,

<sup>79</sup> Benjamin Chew was disowned by Nottingham Monthly Meeting on October 15, 1744, for taking and administering an oath as a justice of the peace.

<sup>80</sup> Generall Yearly Meeting of Friends at Devonshirehouse London, Minutes, April 1, 1691, microfilm at Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College.



Fig. 11. After George M. Woodward, *A Sailor at a Quaker's Funeral*, engraved by Isaac Cruikshank, ca. 1807. (Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College.)

they were not to succumb to pride in their superior virtue or to be self-righteously pious.

In *Meeting House and Counting House*, Frederick Tolles used the phrase “of the best sort but plain” to describe the Quaker “esthetic” and argued that this was an accommodation between the testimony of plainness and the need to maintain the physical manifestation of one’s station in the world, or a “practical resolution of the conflict between his Quaker instincts and his sense of status in society.”<sup>81</sup> More recently, J. William Frost has observed that in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Quakers “believed that requiring plainness brought a self-mortification conducive to the type of ‘tenderness’—or openness—in which one could know God.”<sup>82</sup> He asserts that although “in theory meetings had enormous power over individual behavior, evidence suggests that to a large extent the implementation of plainness was self-

imposed.”<sup>83</sup> Frost also cautions that it is “important ... not to assume a uniformity in either the practice or the discipline of plainness, even within a given monthly meeting.”<sup>84</sup> The choices that Quakers made when they purchased coffins show this variation in behavior.

Friends had to balance their behavior based on inward leadings with the practices of their community. Unconventionality or “singularity” manifested by eccentric or extreme behavior could be dangerous. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one of the eighteenth-century definitions of the word “singularity” was “differing or dissenting from others or from what is generally accepted, esp[ecially] in thought or religion; personal, individual, or independent action, judgment, etc. esp[ecially] in order to render one’s self conspicuous or to attract attention or notice.”<sup>85</sup> Friends believed that, unless closely governed, pride was a natural by-product of

<sup>81</sup> Tolles, “Of the Best Sort but Plain”: The Quaker Esthetic,” 499.

<sup>82</sup> Frost, “From Plainness to Simplicity,” 24.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>85</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “singularity.”



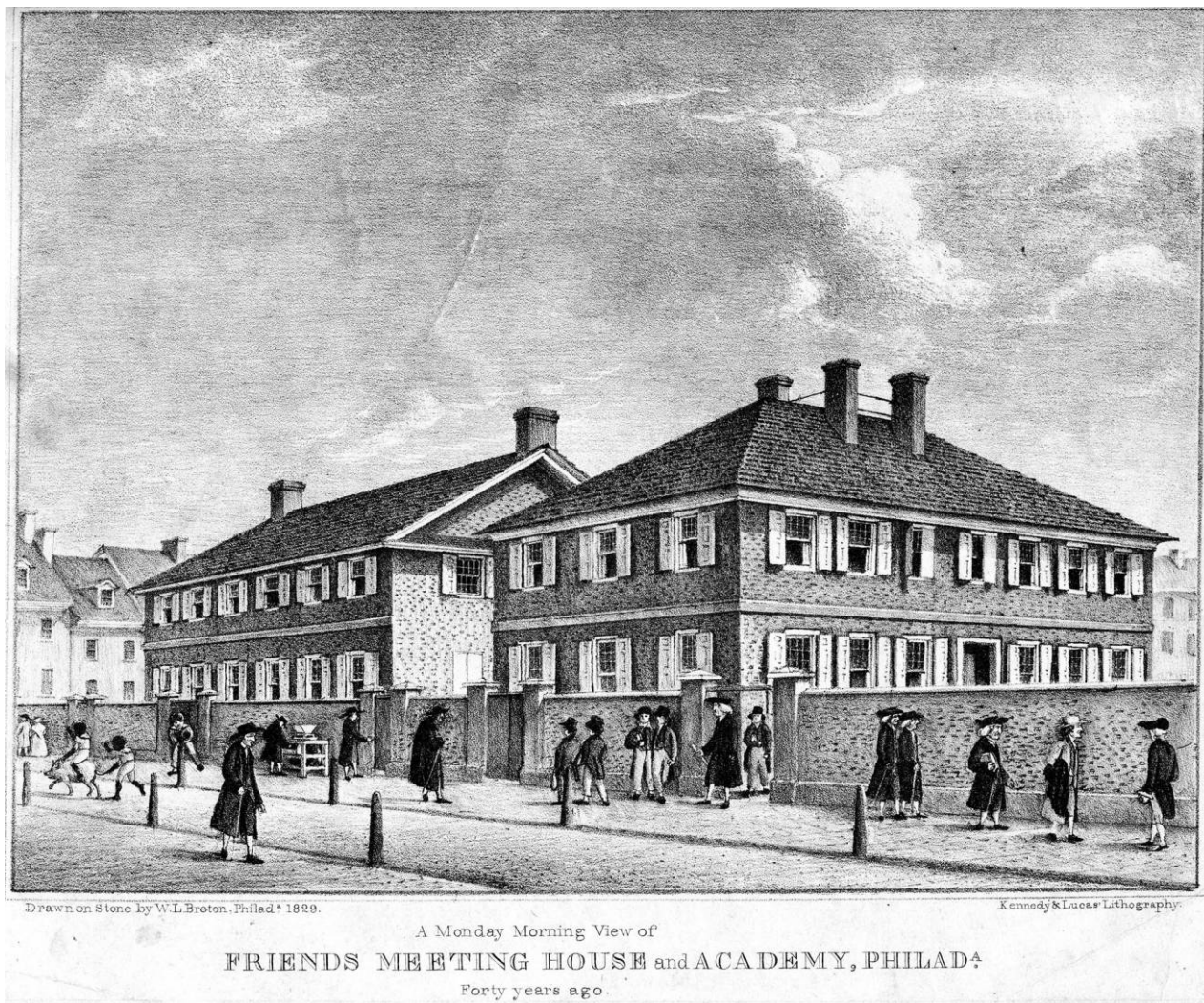


Fig. 12. William A. Breton, *A Monday Morning View of Friends Meeting House and Academy, Philada., Forty Years Ago*, 1829. Lithograph by Kennedy and Lucas. (Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College.)

singularity. In 1761, for instance, prominent Quaker minister John Woolman felt a leading to wear an undyed hat due to his opposition to slavery and its association with the indigo trade. He was apprehensive that others would censure him because he was acting in a singular manner even though he believed that he was being spiritually called to do so:

This singularity was a trial upon me, and more especially at this time, as being in use among some who were fond of following the changeable modes of dress; and as some Friends who knew not on what motives I wore it carried shy of me. ... I had several dyed garments fit for use, which I believed it best to wear till I had occasion of new ones, and some Friends were apprehensive that my wearing such a hat savored of an affected singularity, and such who spoke with me in a friendly way I generally informed in a few words that I believed my wearing it was not in my own will. I had at times been sensible that a

superficial friendship had been dangerous to me, and many Friends being now uneasy with me I found to be a providential kindness.<sup>86</sup>

Adherence to Quaker testimonies necessitated an ongoing internal dialogue. Taking the plainness testimony to its extreme could fuel pride. Emma Lapsansky has noted that there was a concern that externals could at times be “a distraction from—or even a substitute for—piety.”<sup>87</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Phillips P. Moulton, ed., *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 121.

<sup>87</sup> Lapsansky, “Past Plainness to Present Simplicity: A Search for Quaker Identity,” 2. For a concise discussion of plainness in the context of Quaker history, see also Emma J. Lapsansky, “Plainness and Simplicity,” in Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion, *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 335–46.



Fig. 13. *Epistle of Caution against Pride*, 1719. (Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College.)

The relevance of function to the practice of plainness cannot be overestimated. When English minister Martha Routh visited Friends in Philadelphia in the 1790s, she effected a remarkable transformation in the style and material of Quaker headgear over a very short period of time:

It has been the practice for a long time for the Elderly Quaker women, and especially such as fill the superior stations in the church, to wear beaver hats; when fur was plenty ... it became a pretty certain badge of distinction and respect. Not many years hence, a Friend or Friends from London, on a religious visit to America,

wore silk bonnets, which before would have been exempted against, but on examination were found actually to consist of less superfluity and expense; and as the mere habit cannot in itself add to, or diminish from (only our minds incline thereto), the beaver hat is now less frequently worn, and many appear in the line of the ministry differently appareled.<sup>88</sup>

Routh's argument that the silk bonnets were less superfluous and expensive than the beaver hats

<sup>88</sup> *Journal of the Life of Nathaniel Luff, M.D.*, 61.



changed the relative acceptability of these two hat types for members of the Philadelphia community.

“We have not superfluous and needless things upon our coffin”: Quaker Funerary Practices

The choice of a coffin was a public statement of Friends’ testimony of plainness. Quakers were acutely aware of the perceptions of the wider community and were also sensitive to criticism. George Fox, in *An Encouragement for All to Trust in the Lord*, wrote in 1682: “And all you that say, That we Bury like Dogs, because we have not superfluous and needless things upon our Coffin, and white and black cloth with Scutcheons, and do not go in Black, and hang Scarfs upon our Hats, and white Scarfs over our shoulders, and give gold Rings, and have sprigs of Rosemary in our hands, and ring the Bells. How dare you say that we Bury our People like Dogs, because we cannot Bury them after the vain Pumps and Glory of the World.”<sup>89</sup> The fact that Friends buried their dead in unconsecrated ground—because they believed that all ground was God’s—was scandalous; contemporary Anglicans believed that this practice was akin to depositing the body of a pet in a hole in the back orchard.<sup>90</sup> Fox’s rejection of contemporary practice was clearly shocking.

In his preface to Fox’s journal, William Penn is even more specific in his description of early Friends’ burials: “The Corps being in a plain Coffin, without any Covering or Furniture upon it ... they looking upon it as a Worldly Ceremony and piece of Pomp ... Which Conduct of theirs, though unmodish or unfashionable, leaves nothing of the Substance of things neglected or undone; and as they aim at no more, so that simplicity of Life is what they observe with great Satisfaction, though it sometimes happens not to be without the Mockeries of the vain World they live in.”<sup>91</sup> Penn echoed Fox in his rejection of the unnecessary trappings of coffins.

<sup>89</sup> George Fox, *An Encouragement for All to Trust in the Lord Who Hath the Breath of All Mankind, and Their Souls, in His Hand* ... (London: John Brighthurst, 1682), 12.

<sup>90</sup> “1695[6] March 15. John Waring for his honestly living I cannot but mention among ye Christian dead, who was by his relations put ith [*sic*] ground lik [*sic*] a dog in ye Quakers meeting house yard. Rogues,” an entry in the Church of England register at Shipston-on-Stour, Worcestershire, cited in *Journal of the Friends Historical Society* 14, no. 1 (1917): 43.

<sup>91</sup> William Penn, *The Preface, Being a Summary Account of the Divers Dispensations of God to Men ... by the Ministry and Testimony of His Faithful Servant George Fox, as an Introduction to the Ensuing Journal* (London: T. Sowle, 1694), ix.

The printed epistle from London Yearly Meeting in 1751 cautioned Friends to avoid “external marks of sorrow” on the occasion of the premature death of the Prince of Wales: “for a conformity in mere Externals, not agreeable to our Principles, and contrary to the Practice of our worthy Ancients, does but expose us to the observation and pity of wise and discerning Men.”<sup>92</sup> Again, Friends were acutely aware that their distinctiveness invited criticism when they were not consistent in their own behavior. This was particularly true of how one acted or appeared in public.

In Philadelphia Quaker funeral processions were a common sight and shared some characteristics with those of the non-Quaker population. Participation in the procession and interment by invitation only (see fig. 2) was true for Quakers and non-Quakers alike. Most local meetings maintained their own burial grounds, and some purchased a simple bier for the convenience of members, particularly if the coffin was to be carried for long distances. The Quakers’ “old hearse,” pictured in this cabinet card published by Isaac G. Tyson, probably dates from the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century and was used in Philadelphia (fig. 14).<sup>93</sup> This hearse, like those used for non-Quakers, had open sides that exposed the coffin to public view.

In other respects undiscerning outsiders might confuse the simplicity of Delaware Valley Quaker funerals with inadequate or indecent ceremonies as described above in the 1791 poem, “Epitaph.” A French visitor described a typical cortege for Thomas Hallowell to the burial ground at Arch Street in 1788:

I found a number of Friends assembled about the house of the deceased, and waiting in silence for the body to appear. It ... was in a coffin of black walnut, without any covering or ornament, borne by four Friends; [four] women followed, who ... were the nearest relatives and grand-children of the deceased\* [\* None of them were drest in black. The Quakers regard this testimony of grief as childish.] All his friends followed in silence, two by two. ... There were no places designated;

<sup>92</sup> “An Epistle from the Yearly-Meeting held in London,” Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College. Also Gwynne Stock, *An Evaluation of Quaker Burial Practices* (Poole: Bournemouth University, 1997), 20.

<sup>93</sup> Isaac G. Tyson photographed a watercolor by David J. Kennedy, 1864; the latter later labeled the image “Old Hearse belonging to, & kept at Friends Western Burial Ground. About 65 years old, used by Levi and his son Orphlia Hopper while sextons, and now in 1872, by Geo. Reed, who left on March 31, 1875. And Mr. Fogg now has charge in 1880.” Tyson sold a number of nostalgic cabinet cards to Quakers.

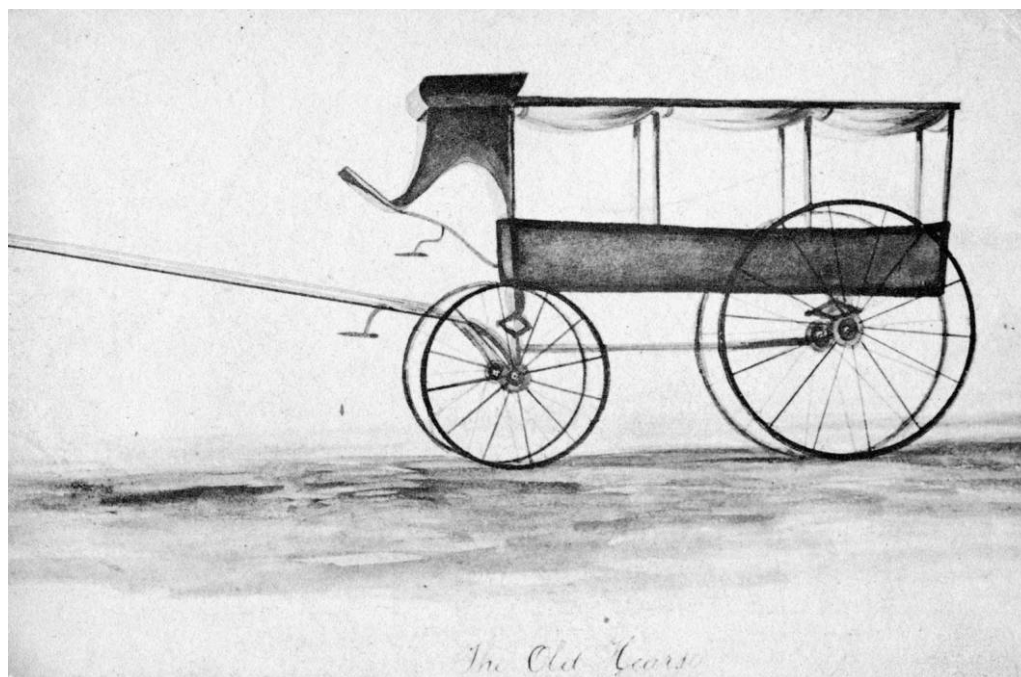


Fig. 14. Cabinet card after David J. Kennedy, Isaac G. Tyson, *The Old Hearse*, Philadelphia, ca. 1880. (Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College.)

young and old mingled together; but all bore the same air of gravity and attention.<sup>94</sup>

Friends in America—like their coreligionists in England—did not ring bells or cover the coffin with a pall; mourners were cautioned against conventional mourning attire. Except on rare occasions, they did not carry the coffin into the meeting house before interment. Friends found ways to remain faithful to their testimonies and distinct from the world, however, while at the same time upholding their families' status through their choice of coffins.

#### Coffins for Quakers in the Greater London Area

Richard Carpender's purchase ledger provides intriguing clues about customs among his London clients. Most of his accounts were labeled with the customers' names, but an extraordinary burial container was ordered in December 1747 "for a Quaker" (fig. 15). This model differed sharply from most of the other coffins recorded in this ledger. It was described as a "6 ft. 14 double lid Elm Coffin Moldings on the Sides, Ogees & 2d. round on the lid, Polished with beeswax" with no cloth exterior

<sup>94</sup> "Travels in the United States of America, performed in 1788 by J. P. Brissot de Warville," in *Historical Account of the Most Celebrated Voyages, Travels, and Discoveries*, ed. William Fordyce Mavor (London: E. Newberry, 1797), 198.

upholstery or decorative nailing. But it was also almost three times more expensive than the coffin and case ordered from Mr. Gladman for Jonathan Hamilton, Esq., on the same date. Presumably since the Quaker coffin was polished and not covered in cloth, it required greater skill to construct and finish. There were no waxed and polished coffins discovered at the Christ Church Spitalfields excavations dating to this period. No coffin plate was charged to the Quaker's account, but, in comparison, Hamilton's estate ordered a full set for an additional charge. A month earlier Carpender made another unusual polished coffin with moldings for Quaker Cecilia Bingham. She was a member of Westminster Meeting, died in 1747 at the age of 56, and was interred at Long Acre burial ground on March 24.<sup>95</sup> Both atypical examples, they were polished but lacked upholstery, plate, and handles, and cost more than others from the same shop.

Cost was clearly an important element for Quaker diarist James Jenkins (1753–1831), who wrote about the burial of his son in Berkshire in 1793: "I buried him at Newbury, with a piece of the shroud hanging outside of the coffin, agreeably to the custom of the place, and which (I understood) is there done by way of proof that the penury of the

<sup>95</sup> Mr. Richard Carpender, Purchase ledger and sundry accounts, May 23, 1747.

Date	Description	Maker	Price
Sept 30	a 2 ft 3 Single Lid	M <sup>r</sup> Glanville	3
Oct 3	a 2 ft 3 Single Lid	M <sup>r</sup> Poole	3
	a 2 ft 3 14 Double Lid	M <sup>r</sup> Walsby	14
15	a 2 ft 9 14 Double Lid 2 ft 2 1/2 Double Lid	M <sup>r</sup> Williams	1 4
17	a 2 ft 6 Single Lid	M <sup>r</sup> Wether	10
19	a 2 ft 3 15 Double Lid Clop naid	M <sup>r</sup> Hunt	16
22	a 2 ft 6 Single Lid	Ch <sup>r</sup> Jones	10
26	a 2 ft 13 8 1/2 Single Lid	M <sup>r</sup> Bowker	11
	a 2 ft 6 8 1/2 Clop naid		16
Novemb	a 2 ft 9 Single Lid	M <sup>r</sup> Castle Frank	4
	a 2 ft 9 14 Double Lid Clop naid	M <sup>r</sup> Thorne	16
4	a 2 ft 6 Single Lid		10
7	a 2 ft 9 Single Lid	M <sup>r</sup> Wether	10
	a 2 ft 6 8 1/2 Clop naid	M <sup>r</sup> Wether	10
9	a 2 ft 13 8 1/2 Single Lid	M <sup>r</sup> Bond Waleh	15
10	a 2 ft 3, 14 Double Lid Clop naid	M <sup>r</sup> Ballen	11
10	a 2 ft 3 Single Lid	M <sup>r</sup> Eve	15
16	a 2 ft 9 M <sup>r</sup> Denmark		3
18	a 2 ft 9 14 Double Lid	M <sup>r</sup> Caspary	15
19	a 2 ft 9 Single Lid M <sup>r</sup> John Men		10
20	a 2 ft 3 Single Lid	M <sup>r</sup> White	2
24	a 2 ft 3 Single Lid	M <sup>r</sup> Williams	9
27	a 2 ft 20 1/2 Double Lid Clop naid	M <sup>r</sup> Cooke	1
1	a 2 ft 6 14 Double Lid	M <sup>r</sup> Mathewson	14
1	a 2 ft 17 Double Lid Clop naid	M <sup>r</sup> Simpson	18
1	a 2 ft 9 Single Lid	M <sup>r</sup> Poole	4
3	a 2 ft 14 Double Lid	M <sup>r</sup> Clark	14
	a 2 ft 13 Single Lid	M <sup>r</sup> Hamilton	11
	a 2 ft 6 8 1/2 Clop naid		16
5	a 2 ft 14 Double Lid Elm Coffin Standing on the 2 sides open at 2 ends on the 2 sides with 3-5 Bashford		3-5

Brought from Feb 48

20-0-0  
27-13-4  
1747-185

Fig. 15. Coffin for a Quaker (at bottom of page), Account Book of Richard Carpenter, 1747. (CLC/B/227/MS05871, London Metropolitan Archives, City of London.)

relatives of the deceased is not so great as to preclude this burying for the dead the needful attire.”<sup>96</sup> Jenkins was able to fulfill his perceived duty to family in the greater society by a demonstrable outlay of funds.

The excavation of the Quaker burial ground at Kingston-upon-Thames, near London, further reveals differences as well as some similarities in coffin use and construction between Quaker and non-Quaker practices. The investigators ultimately concluded that the “archaeological evidence suggests that the simplicity and plainness of Quaker lifestyle were to a large extent reflected in burial.”<sup>97</sup> Friends

<sup>96</sup> James Jenkins and J. W. Frost, *The Records and Recollections of James Jenkins* (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1984), 342.

<sup>97</sup> Louise Bashford and Lucy Sibun, “Excavations at the Quaker Burial Ground, Kingston-upon-Thames, London,” *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 41 (2007): 100.

at Kingston had purchased a garden and orchard as a burial ground, using it from 1664 to 1814. Four hundred and ninety-seven burials have been documented, but it is clear that not all burials were recorded because some initials and dates did not correspond to the registers; Quaker burial grounds were not generally “select” or limited to Friends and might include a few nonmembers with familial or geographic ties to the meeting.<sup>98</sup> Except for one extended family of wealthy linen drapers, Quakers at Kingston appear to have been a “thriving, generally middle-class mercantile community.”<sup>99</sup> Apart from sixteen triple-case coffins (inner wooden coffin, lead shell, and outer wooden case) that were mostly associated with the former, the remaining coffins were “single-case, single-break, flat-lidded types of modest decorative appearance.”<sup>100</sup> Studs, one of the primary means of attaching fabric to the exterior of the coffin, were present in only a little over one-sixth of the documented examples from Kingston.

### Coffins for Quakers in the Delaware Valley

Accommodation to the plainness testimony as evidenced in coffin design in the Quaker communities in the Delaware Valley differed from that in the area around London during the same period. In 1724 John Head debited the account of Quaker George Arman [Harmer] £2 for “his Sons Coffin redg’d.”<sup>101</sup> Six of his coffins were specifically described as ridged, which was one of Head’s most expensive types. Of the six, members of the Society of Friends commissioned at least five. This high representation of Quakers as purchasers of expensive coffins should not be viewed as atypical, because the group dominated the ranks of the elite in Philadelphia in the first half of the eighteenth century. After the American Revolution, however,

<sup>98</sup> In the Bathford burial ground in Somerset, nonmembers accounted for at least 11.6 percent of registered interments. See Gwynne Stock, “The 18th and Early 19th Century Quaker Burial Ground at Bathford, Bath and North-East Somerset,” in *Grave Concerns: Death and Burial in England, 1700 to 1850*, ed. Margaret Cox (York: Council for British Archaeology, 1998), 144–53.

<sup>99</sup> Bashford and Sibun, “Excavations,” 142.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>101</sup> John Head Account Book, 1724. Jacob Harmer was interred at Friends Burial Ground on July 16, 1724, and is listed in the section “Account of Deceased Friends.” Many of Head’s clients were members of the Society of Friends. Names can be correlated either with the minutes of Philadelphia Monthly Meeting or “An Account of the deceased Buried in the Buring [sic] ground in Philadelphia, 1688–1807,” manuscript deposited in Friends Historical Library. Separate lists of interred members and nonmembers were kept by the sextant in the latter until the middle of the eighteenth century.

their influence had begun to erode, and the number of members of the Society of Friends declined as disownments increased.

In 1784 Philadelphia joiner William Savery was still producing walnut gable-topped coffins for wealthy Quakers even as fashion changed.<sup>102</sup> Savery signed a receipt for the estate of deceased Quaker silversmith Joseph Richardson: "To Making a walnut rided coffin with tinned handles for said Richardson £4.10.0."<sup>103</sup> Given the inflationary environment of Philadelphia in the period, direct comparison of costs is inconclusive; however, non-Quakers paid £8 in 1788 for a mahogany coffin with inscription plate and handles and £14 in 1792 for a cloth-covered, lined coffin with inscription plate and handles, based on David Evans's account book.<sup>104</sup> In general the costs appear comparable, but the sample is small.<sup>105</sup> By the mid-1780s the walnut gabled coffin was certainly a much older style. Not all wealthy Philadelphia Quakers chose gabled coffins at the end of the eighteenth century, but the appearance of a traditional yet expensive form in public, without a pall or other covering, would have made a public statement, confirming family status by significant outlay of funds but also conforming to the testimony of plainness.

For devout Friends, familial and societal responsibilities extended to one's servants and dependents. In the case of a monthly meeting, this would extend to inmates of hospitals and almshouses under its direct care. In 1775 Joseph Pemberton paid the same Savery for "a walnut Ridg'd Coffin Silver'd handles for his Negro £3.0.0."<sup>106</sup> In 1785, Philadelphia Monthly Meeting's Committee of Twelve reimbursed the joiner £4.10.0 for a "ridged walnut coffin without handles for Mary Deal" (fig. 16).<sup>107</sup> That same year the committee paid him £5.0.0 for "mak-

ing a walnut rided coffin with Best Silvered handles for John Burdin" (fig. 17).<sup>108</sup> Both Deal and Burdin were poor Friends and were financially supported by the Meeting. The latter had been given the job of cleaning the meeting house; the former, a widow, boarded with S[amuel?] Shoemaker. Despite these individuals' marginal economic status, both coffins were recognizably costly but not high style. As they were carried through the streets of Philadelphia to the burial ground, they demonstrated the concern of the Meeting to the end.

Nathaniel Luff's published journal provides a unique insight into one Quaker's decision-making process in respect to the choice of a coffin. Luff was a Delaware physician who was raised as an Anglican but became a member of the Society of Friends in 1791. When his first wife, Elizabeth Fisher, died in 1796, he chose a mahogany coffin but recalled comments made by a Quaker elder at the burial of his seven-year-old daughter in 1793:

She was a valuable woman, and I was willing to show a respect to her memory. I directed a mahogany coffin, but when my child died, it was intimated to me by a very exemplary [*sic*] elder, Caleb Seal, and member of our meeting, that the polish on coffins appeared exceptionable to him, and that he should choose a particular kind of wood for his coffin, oak; it appeared reasonable that the polish and costly wood with large silver plate, and much pains taken to invite to funerals, has too much of pomp and pride, and that the love of the world and fear of worldliness often gives rise and continues us in these practices.<sup>109</sup>

When a three-year-old son died in 1803, Luff again struggled with his decision respecting the burial container:

There were but few at the burial, being but few invitations, for I felt a repugnance in my mind at parade in funerals; and being somewhat exercised respecting the polish of coffins and ridging as things unnecessary, I requested the cabinet maker to have the lid flat, and without polish, reminding him, at the same time, that it did not proceed from fancy, or a desire of being singular, but, as I apprehended, from motives of duty. This same man made a cradle for this child, and I directed it to be made of poplar or pine, not of walnut, and without a top, as is pretty customary; my reasons were, it would be much lighter and easily moved about ... [but] when it was brought to my father-in-law's [house] ... he seemed offended, and asked why we did not get a walnut one—or it might have been painted he said; so that when this duty appeared to be presented to my mind ... that if [he] saw

<sup>102</sup> William Savery was a member of Philadelphia Monthly Meeting who died in 1787 at the age of 65; his son, also named William Savery, became a renowned Quaker minister. The Committee of Twelve contracted with a number of Quaker joiners for coffins for the poor, but most of the receipts have not survived. For example, 1785 accounts with Jacob Shoemaker, Treasurer, show that they paid John Townsend £3 for a coffin for Rebecca Penrose. Costs of caring for the poor—wood, board, and funeral expenses—were drawn from designated funds and subscriptions.

<sup>103</sup> Receipt, October 5, 1784, Richardson Family Papers, 1784–88, Winterthur Library.

<sup>104</sup> "Excerpts from the Day-Books of David Evans," 49–51.

<sup>105</sup> Samuel H. Williamson, "Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1774 to present," *MeasuringWorth* (2015), <http://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/>.

<sup>106</sup> Account (copy), February 20, 1775, Savery Family Papers, 1767–1858, Winterthur Library.

<sup>107</sup> Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, Miscellaneous Papers, July 26, 1785, Haverford College Quaker Collection, Haverford, PA.

<sup>108</sup> Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, Miscellaneous Papers, February 12, 1785, Haverford College Quaker Collection, Haverford, PA.

<sup>109</sup> *Journal of the Life of Nathaniel Luff, M.D.*, 46.

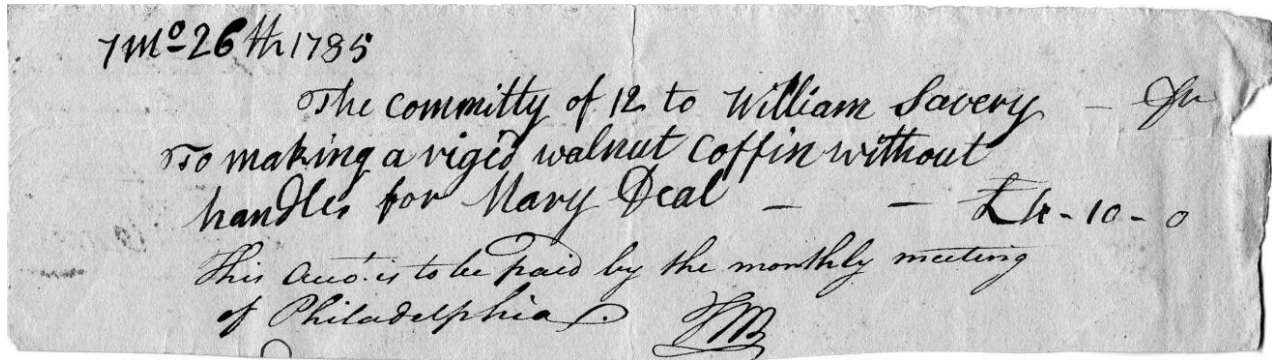


Fig. 16. Receipt for ridged walnut coffin, William Savery, 1785. (Haverford College Quaker Collection.)

it in this unusual form, he would be displeased, and attribute it to whim or singularity ... but when I began deeply to consider the source from whence this duty sprung, as I believed, and the cross, fearing to be accounted singular, &c. ... I felt easy at the direction I had given, and the child was interred in the coffin according as I directed.<sup>110</sup>

Thus, in choosing a coffin of polished costly wood for his wife Luff displeased an elder, and in choosing one without polish and ridging for his child he displeased his father-in-law and worried that his choice of flat-topped coffin would be perceived as singular. His internal dialogue echoed Woolman's worry that the singularity of wearing an undyed hat in 1761 could fuel pride and set him apart from the group.

Luff's journal entries imply that ridged coffins were common in his southern Delaware Quaker community. They also demonstrate that at least for some Quakers in this country, the polished wood chosen by London Friends was exceptionable. But Quakers on both sides of the Atlantic mostly eschewed an external wooden case. The journal of William Adams, a Quaker schoolmaster from Woodstown, New Jersey, described a typical burial container used in his neighborhood at the end of the eighteenth century. "The coffin was made of Linn, a walnut, with a ridged top, and hinges at the shoulders, so that the lid could be screwed on, and the face be exposed, by laying back the two covers which were over it. A[n external wooden] case was seldom used."<sup>111</sup>

Sufficient archaeological evidence from Friends' burial sites in the Philadelphia region to

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 196–97.

<sup>111</sup> William Adams, "Reminiscences No. 19 [Extracts from the Manuscript Biography or Diary of William Adams, from 1779 to 1858, continued]," *The Journal: A Paper Devoted to the Interests of the Society of Friends* 1, no. 44 (December 3, 1873): 348. The incorporation of hinges as an option in the design of high-fashion flat-topped coffins took place at roughly the same time, in the last decade of the eighteenth century.

evaluate the hypothesis that eighteenth-century Quakers were more likely than the general population to choose old-fashioned, gabled hexagonal coffins is not yet available.<sup>112</sup> One of the most extensively documented Quaker archaeological sites in the United States is the burial ground in Alexandria, Virginia. Many of the original members of the Meeting had migrated to the area from Bucks County, Pennsylvania, in the mid-eighteenth century, and the site had served as a burial ground from 1784 until the 1890s. Between 1993 and 1995 sixty-six interments were excavated in preparation for an addition to the Barrett Library and reburied elsewhere on the property. One-quarter (sixteen) of the coffins were determined to have had gabled lids, and nine were flat; only three of the former had hardware that could be dated to after 1850. It was not possible to segregate the eighteenth-century interments from those of the nineteenth century. Nineteen of the sixty-six were enclosed within coffin boxes, but there was only one iron coffin, dated after 1854.<sup>113</sup>

Archaeological and documentary sources indicate that the gable-lid form evolved as a vernacular style into the first half of the nineteenth century in non-elite and rural populations with historic ties to Philadelphia. John Janney, the grandson of Friends who had moved from Bucks County to Goose

<sup>112</sup> The only other vaguely relevant Quaker burial ground excavation of which I am aware is that of Damascus in Ohio. However, the site was not opened as a burial ground until 1807, when Friends from Pennsylvania and Virginia migrated to Columbiana County. It was used until 1843. Of the 118 coffins that were identified, at least nineteen were gabled. See John Robert White, "The Archaeological Exhumation of Damascus Friends Burying Ground #17," *Ohio Archaeologist* 53, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 26–31.

<sup>113</sup> The use of lead liners did not appear to have been very common in Philadelphia, either, except when burial was delayed for a considerable time. Elizabeth Drinker makes mention of the former only once in connection with an acquaintance whose body was shipped to Philadelphia for interment. "My husband informs that the Body of Mary de Brahm has arrived here from S[ou]th Carolina in a lead coffin. ... It was her desire to be buried by her Husband" (*Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, 1907).



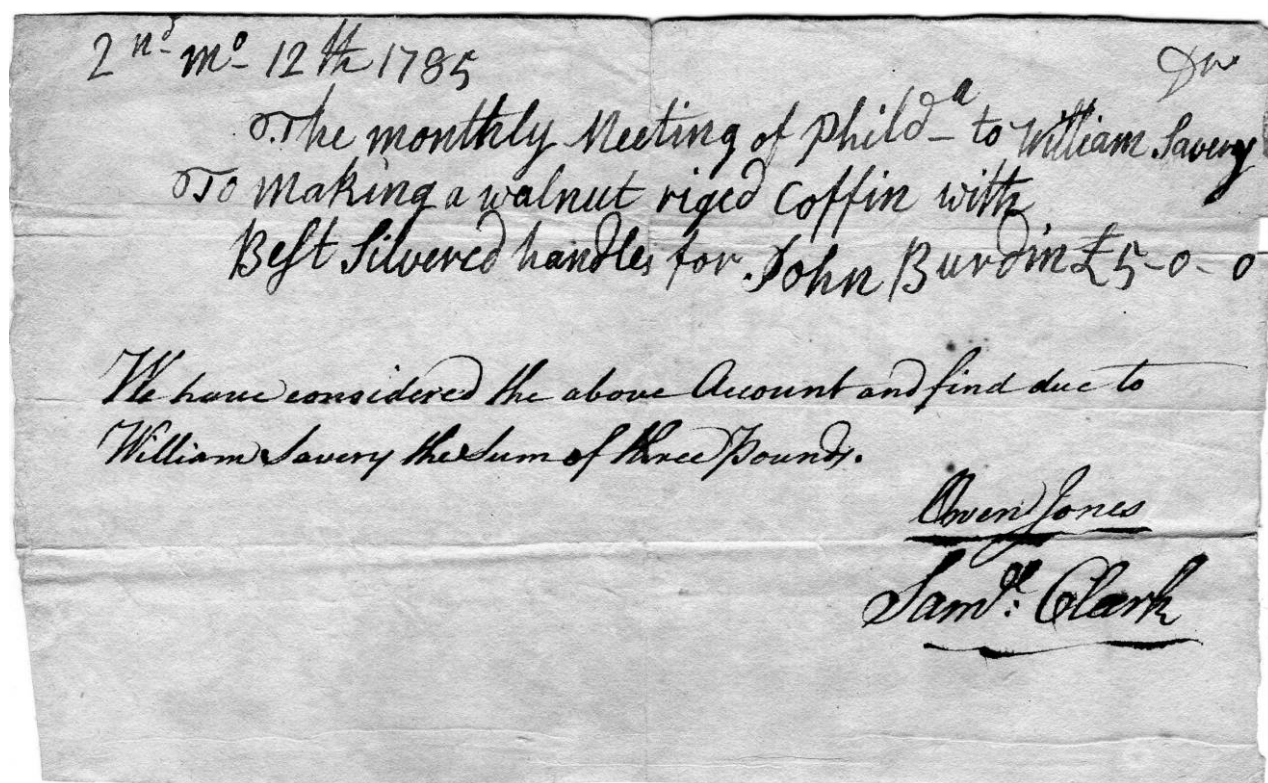


Fig. 17. Receipt for ridged walnut coffin with best silvered handles, William Savery, 1785. (Haverford College Quaker Collection.)

Creek, Virginia, in about 1750, reported that in his Loudon County, Virginia, Quaker community in the early nineteenth century, coffins were made by the same cabinetmaker who provided furniture and wagons and built houses. Plain coffins were made of cherry and polished with beeswax: "the top was not flat but like the roof of a house."<sup>114</sup> He also recalled that burial cases were not used. Apparently the gable-lid coffin also persisted in Philadelphia's African American community. John Milner's investigation of the first African Baptist Church yard—used between 1810 and 1822—revealed that many of the eighty-nine burials were in wooden hexagonal coffins with gabled lids, and only three of these had decorative hardware.<sup>115</sup> In contrast, an archaeological excavation of the African

burial ground in New York City, also conducted by Milner, did not discover any gable-lidded coffins at that site.<sup>116</sup> These differences imply that the vernacular style was local to the Philadelphia area.

The fact that the gable-lid coffin was considerably out-of-date by the late eighteenth century and recognizably more expensive than other forms to construct would have appealed to American Quaker customers. Here was a form that demonstrated the family's adherence to the plainness testimony as well as met familial and societal responsibilities to provide a decent funeral. By the middle of the eighteenth century it could in no way be ascribed to "vain fashion." It also deflected the perception that burial in one of Philadelphia's Quaker burial grounds, such as the one at Arch Street, had a penurious motive (fig. 18). In writing about nonmembers who wished to be interred at Arch Street, diarist Elizabeth Sandwith Drinker voiced a common suspicion, namely, "some are desereous [*sic*] I believe to save expenses."<sup>117</sup> Even after the Meeting required

<sup>114</sup> Werner L. Janney and Asa Moore, *John Jay Janney's Virginia* (McLean, VA: EPM Publications, 1978), 97. The original of this reminiscence, "A Sketch of My Earlier Biography," is in the Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley. Both the original and the published version contain Janney's sketches of the hexagonal ridged coffin.

<sup>115</sup> Michael Parrington, Jennifer Olsen Kelley, Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority, and First African Baptist Church, *The First African Baptist Church Cemetery: Bioarcheology, Demography, and Acculturation of Early Nineteenth Century Philadelphia Blacks* (Philadelphia: John Milner Associates, 1989).

<sup>116</sup> Jean Howson and Leonard G. Bianchi, "Coffins," in *New York African Burial Ground Archaeology Final Report*, February 2006, chap. 10, 255, [www.africanburialground.gov/FinalReports/Archaeology/ABG\\_Ch10FEB.pdf](http://www.africanburialground.gov/FinalReports/Archaeology/ABG_Ch10FEB.pdf).

<sup>117</sup> *Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, 1120.

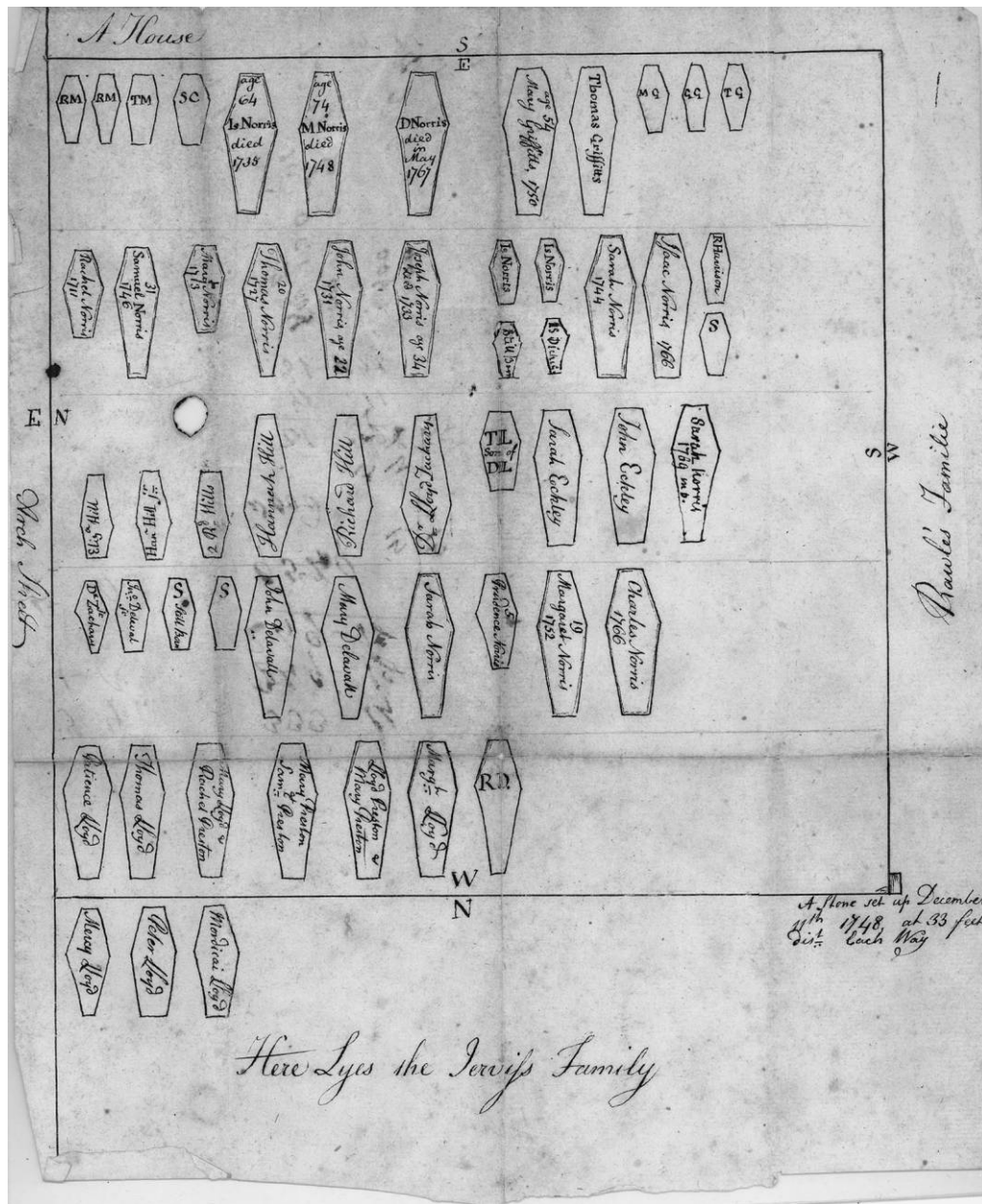


Fig. 18. Plan of the Norris Family Burial Section, Arch Street Burial Ground, Philadelphia, ca. 1770. (Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College.)

four signatures (instead of the requisite two for members) for nonmembers' burial permits, the only fee charged to either was that of the sextant, who billed according to the size of the opening.

### Navigating the Unmarked Road

Members of the Society of Friends followed their own individual spiritual leadings, rather than a set of specific external rules. Response to the plainness

testimony and testimonies in general could vary over a wide spectrum, from that of ministers and elders to those whose connection to Friends was tenuous. Among the former and the more observant Quakers the fundamental testimonies served as a hedge against the temptations of the larger society and also affirmed ties to family and meeting. But taking the plainness testimony to extremes—singularity—was also to be avoided, as it could fuel self-pride to the detriment of community. Therefore local responses tended toward uniformity. When

American John Woolman lay on his deathbed in England in 1772, he asked, “What kind of coffins are mostly used by Friends here? How the corpse are usually wrapped, &c. and the expense?”<sup>118</sup> Woolman had no expectation that customs were the same as in New Jersey, only a conviction that the Quakers of York had developed a standard practice.

What exactly was a plain coffin in the eighteenth century? The answer, like the form, is not simple. Quakers could read Fox’s and Penn’s written instructions about how to conduct a Quaker funeral, but neither man said anything more specific about coffins than that these should have no “covering or furniture.”<sup>119</sup> And we learn from the archaeological findings as well as archival records that most English and American Friends avoided cases and

upholstered coffins popular in the mid-eighteenth century. Thus, some London Quakers ordered polished wood coffins from Richard Carpender ornamented only with moldings so as to demonstrate their adherence to “exemplary plainness of habit, speech, and deportment, which distinguished our forefathers.”<sup>120</sup> These coffins were no cheaper than the upholstered variety, however, thereby deflecting criticism that the choice was anything other than religious expression. It did not conceal motives of miserliness or lack of regard for “decent” family values. In Philadelphia after 1760 the continued use of a well-crafted older and no longer fashionable style—walnut coffins with gabled lids—may have achieved the same end. But the preference for a form that reflected the past also may have referenced a time when Quakers dominated political and social life in the Delaware Valley. And ridging—although it might seem superfluous to us in comparison with a simple pine box—was relatively simple compared with non-Quaker George Ross’s “Mahogany Coffin, inscription plate, handles & case.”<sup>121</sup> In the end, the practice of the plainness testimony in the eighteenth century was more complex than merely the absence of ornament, the simplicity of Truth “this side of the grave.”

<sup>118</sup> John Woolman and Amelia M. Gummere, *The Journal and Essays of John Woolman* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 324–25. Incorporated into the published Woolman journal is an extract of a letter from William Tuke referencing a conversation that he had with Woolman prior to his decease in 1772: “What kind of coffins are mostly used by Friends here? How the corpse are usually wrapped, &c. and the expense? I told him Friends would be very willing to bear those charges, in case of his decease; but he was not easy they should, and therefore, after some consideration, ordered me to write the inclosed [*sic*]: ‘An ash coffin made plain without any manner of superfluities, the corpse wrapped in cheap flannel, the expense of which I leave my wearing clothes to defray, as also the digging of the grave.’ ... He was not willing to have the coffin made of oak, because it is a wood more useful than ash for other purposes.”

<sup>119</sup> William Penn, “Preface,” ix.

<sup>120</sup> *Extracts from the Minutes and Advices of the Yearly Meeting of Friends Held in London* ([London]: James Phillips, 1783), 189.

<sup>121</sup> “Excerpts from the Day-Books of David Evans,” 49.