

**“by her needle maintain herself with  
reputation:” Philadelphia Quaker  
Women and the Materiality of Piety,  
1758-1760**

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After meeting for worship one April morning in 1758, Henry Drinker brought Hannah Callender’s friend Caty some handkerchiefs to hem.<sup>1</sup> Since none of the three young Quakers were married yet, this requested favor had the potential to create scandal in mid-eighteenth century Philadelphia. Women usually made this type of personal item for their husbands, not necessarily their male friends – perhaps the community would infer that Caty and Henry Drinker were courting too quickly. However, in her diary, Callender believed in her friend’s ability to maintain her virtue while making useful personal belongings for a friend. Callender wrote in her diary that she did not doubt, “but Caty can by her needle maintain herself with reputation.”<sup>2</sup> Like many other non-Quaker women, Callender and her contemporaries made things for themselves as well as family and friends. However, their actions had distinctly Quaker undertones that related to broader discussions of plainness. Social context set the

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<sup>1</sup> Diary of Hannah Callender Sansom, April 1758, in *The Diary of Hannah Callender Sansom: Sense and Sensibility in the Age of the American Revolution*, ed. Susan E. Klepp and Karin Wulf (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 98.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

Callender usually attended meeting on Sundays and Wednesdays, but she also attended on other days of the week. *Ibid.*, 15.

parameters of pious behavior for these Philadelphia Quakers. The acts of creation and exchange, even in the case of just a few hemmed handkerchiefs, represented the materiality of Quaker piety.

Plainness directed many facets of material daily life for Quakers in eighteenth-century England and her colonies. From the garments that they made to the ways that they spoke, Quakers grappled with the outward trappings of piety. Also known as the Society of Friends, Quakers believed that eschewing excessive material possessions would allow individuals to focus on their own relationships with God. Unofficial Quaker guidance enumerated some vague criteria for plain garments around the turn of the eighteenth century, but aside from this, pious members largely decided for themselves what was or was not plain.<sup>3</sup> Scholars of design history analyze “plainness” as a rhetorical stance through furniture and Quaker clothing but neglect the application of this concept to eighteenth-century Quaker women. Despite the supposed flexibility of this theological concept, plainness underpinned far more of the ways in which these women related to one another and the world around them in socially proscriptive ways.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Anne Caton, “The Aesthetics of Absence: Quaker Women’s Plain Dress in the Delaware Valley, 1790-1900,” in *Quaker Aesthetics: Reflections on a Quaker Ethic in American Design and Consumption*, ed. Emma Jones Lapsansky and Anne A. Verplanck (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 247-248.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Garfinkel, “Quakers and High Chests: The Plainness Problem Reconsidered,” in Lapsansky and Verplanck, 66-69. Scholars such as Mary Ann Caton focus on nineteenth-century plain clothing and interpret it as a demonstration of piety through the eschewing of excessive material goods, which included elaborate hairstyles, extreme garment silhouettes, and heavily adorned clothing. However, Susan Garfinkel notes that objects like Chippendale furniture fit within the discursive context of Quaker belief systems. For further reading, see *Quaker Aesthetics: Reflections on a Quaker Ethic in American Design and Consumption*, ed. Emma Jones Lapsansky and Anne A. Verplanck (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

The aesthetics and behaviors of plainness go beyond peculiar clothing and speech; they offer insight into uniquely gendered, lived, daily experiences for Philadelphia's late eighteenth-century Quaker women. Historians who edited the diaries of these women focus on the stages of their lives, their thoughts about revolutionary ideas, and their literary networks, rather than the intersections of their religious beliefs and material worlds.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, some social practices that may not appear Quaker did, in fact, have Quaker undertones. A close study of the diaries and possessions of figures including Elizabeth Sandwith Drinker, Grace Peel Dowell Parr, Hannah Callender Sansom, and their contemporaries illuminates how Philadelphia Quaker women interacted with the theology of plainness through the exchange of things. These young, unmarried, wealthy women did not yet have husbands or children of their own to sew for, so they had the time to make objects for their friends and other peers during the few years between the beginning of their diaries and their marriages.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the years 1758-1760 illustrate each woman's experience with purchasing, creating, and exchanging objects, yet these years also illuminate the commonalities of their practices of plainness in eighteenth-century Philadelphia.

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<sup>5</sup> See Elaine Forman Crane, *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker: The Life Cycle of an Eighteenth-Century Woman* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994); Susan E. Klepp and Karin Wulf, *The Diary of Hannah Callender Sansom: Sense and Sensibility in the Age of the American Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); Catherine La Courreya Bleck and Karin A. Wulf, *Milcah Martha Moore's Book: A Commonplace Book from Revolutionary America* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Callender lent her diary to the Sandwith sisters on June 2, 1760. Klepp and Wulf, 4.

Whether through fine art or women's work in domestic spaces, the beliefs of elite eighteenth-century Philadelphia Quaker women were not only spiritual, but material experiences as well.<sup>7</sup> Social engagements, commissioning of portraits, and making useful things for family and friends were acceptable, plain activities because they encompassed women's exercise of piety through the assessment and creation of things within the context of the Quaker community. Rather than lapses of faith, these practices represented individual interpretations of plainness within rigid social boundaries that were both necessary for and aligned with a faith that did not separate the religious from the secular. During the brief period from 1758 to 1760, these young, elite, unmarried women enacted plainness through the construction of material worlds for both themselves and others in the Philadelphia Quaker community.

Scholarship on the Quakers tends to outline their basic theological concepts, neglecting the study of both gender and materiality. Historian Frederick B. Tolles, a Quaker himself, notes that Friends lived by the basic tenets of equality, simplicity, community, and peace. Underlying all of this was the belief "that God speaks in every human heart."<sup>8</sup> Tolles argues that early Quakers had no use for fine art, but other scholars take issue with his assertions that eighteenth-century American Quaker artists rejected their

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<sup>7</sup> According to historian J. William Frost, most of the American Quakers were farmers, as well as artisans and merchants in urban centers (see J. William Frost, *The Quaker Family in Colonial America: A Portrait of the Society of Friends* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 187). Even though these elite women may not be representative of most eighteenth-century American Quakers, this paper analyzes documents written by these women because of the scarcity of material written by Quaker women.

<sup>8</sup> Frederick B. Tolles, *Quakers and the Atlantic Culture* (New York: Octagon Books, 1980), ix, 2-4.

Quaker backgrounds in order to pursue their art.<sup>9</sup> He does, however, concede that there were no religious dictates against the work of craftsmen, such as cabinetmakers and silversmiths because their products were useful.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, Tolles concludes that by the eighteenth century, plainness among elite Philadelphia Quakers was relative. Luxury goods were indicative of their owners' hard work and God's favor. The heterogeneous nature of plainness halted after what Tolles refers to as "drastic purging and pruning" occurred at the end of the eighteenth century. Historian Jack Marietta later explicates this withdrawal of Quakers from worldly pursuits.<sup>11</sup> Overall, both historians neglect the social context of the creation and exchange of goods within eighteenth-century Quaker communities.

Recent scholarship attempts to find manifestations of Quaker beliefs in extant material culture and still struggles to define the characteristics of Quaker design. Building upon Tolles' foundational history of the Quakers, scholars Emma Jones Lapsansky and Anne A. Verplanck compiled a series of essays entitled *Quaker Aesthetics: Reflections on a Quaker Ethic in American Design and Consumption*. This work focuses on American Quaker material culture in Philadelphia and the Delaware Valley from the eighteenth through twentieth centuries and

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<sup>9</sup> Tolles, 79. For arguments against Tolles and references to his work as generative, see 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).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 80.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 87-90.

For further reading on Quaker reform, see Jack D. Marietta, *The Reformation of American Quakerism, 1748-1783* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984).

addresses Quaker relationships to modernization, capitalism, and religion.<sup>12</sup> Emma Jones Lapsansky highlights the tension between outward dress and behavior as either an element of a Quaker's pious actions or as a substitute for genuine piety. She also states that Quaker beliefs encompass many contradictory values, such as equality and separation, intellectualism and anti-intellectualism, and excellence and humility.<sup>13</sup> Overall, this interdisciplinary group of scholars conclude that there is no specific set of characteristics that define Quaker aesthetics. The ways in which Quakers strived to live pious lives did not manifest itself in the visual components, but rather the context of the artifacts they created.

In her chapter of *Quaker Aesthetics*, historian Susan Garfinkel complicates this apparent dichotomy between Quakers and the world through her argument that members who owned elaborate furniture did not deviate from doctrines because plainness was flexible.<sup>14</sup> Overall, she argues that Quaker beliefs can include material goods that might not strike outsiders as plain. Furthermore, she notes that, "Quaker plainness is more important for what it does than for what it means."<sup>15</sup> However, she does not state exactly what plainness does, aside from its use as a "rhetorical stance" rather than as an adjective.<sup>16</sup> In her analysis, plainness is relative and should be studied in its proper social contexts. The study of the social and material worlds of Quaker women like Callender and Sandwith can illuminate the ways in which plainness operated as a

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<sup>12</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), xiii.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 2-3.

<sup>14</sup> Garfinkel in Lapsansky and Verplanck, 52.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 53.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 66-69.

rhetorical stance that reinforced the highly contextual boundaries of this tenet.

Garfinkel ties the meaning of plainness to the concept of silence, which Quakers viewed as necessary to access God's truth. Meetings were usually silent and followed a sequence in which someone recited a prayer then waited for a fellow Friend to be moved by their Inner Light to give a sermon. Anyone could theoretically give a sermon, but ministers and elders with high standing within the meeting usually gave them and decided when worship concluded.<sup>17</sup> In Garfinkel's analysis, plainness and silence were both a mental state that required little explanation for Friends.<sup>18</sup> Quakers did not explain many of the terms that they used for plainness because, much like God's truth, the community understood the discursive framework.<sup>19</sup> In contrast to silence, plain speech meant that Friends used words like "thee" and "thou" instead of the formal "you" to refute social hierarchies. In their diaries, Callender and Sandwith referred to months and days of the week in numerical order instead of by their "heathen Roman names", such as Thursday and June.<sup>20</sup> While plainness was contextual, it also included actions and material productions within proscriptive social boundaries for Quaker women.

In the seventeenth century, Quakers held similar beliefs to Puritans regarding ostentation and material goods. In his explication of the origins of colonial

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<sup>17</sup> Garfinkel in Lapsansky and Verplanck, 71-72.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 65-67. For further reading on the extent to which this discursive framework was actually broadly understood, see Jack Marietta's study of Quaker disciplinary records in *The Reformation of American Quakerism, 1748-1783*.

<sup>20</sup> Garfinkel in Lapsansky and Verplanck, 65.

American portraiture, art historian Wayne Craven ties the beginnings of both early America and its portraits to the character and piety of late seventeenth-century Puritan men.<sup>21</sup> Grace Peel's commissioning of her portrait demonstrated material prosperity that reflected God's favor and was therefore acceptable.<sup>22</sup> Seventeenth-century Quakers shared many of these beliefs with the Puritans; however, the Puritans defined ostentation in even more vague terms than the Quakers. While Friends may have been slightly more specific, their material culture is not always discernable from its non-Quaker counterparts, especially over the course of the eighteenth century. Overall, provenance and intent marked Quaker plainness from ostentation.

Quaker beliefs revolved around an individual's relationship to God without mediating factors like clergy or rituals. George Fox founded the Religious Society of Friends in the Truth, or the Quakers, in mid seventeenth-century England. In contrast to some other Protestant denominations, Quakers believed in a loving God and that children were born in innocence that could be maintained throughout their lives through piety.<sup>23</sup> Everyone had access to God through their own Inner or Inward Light, which meant that there were no official hierarchies within meetings.<sup>24</sup> They believed that preaching was not as important as living pious lives without division between the secular and the religious. Additionally, like Catholics and many other Protestants, they strived to be "in the world, not of it," and one element of this tenet was to refrain from

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<sup>21</sup> Wayne Craven, *Colonial American Portraiture: The Economic, Religious, Social, Cultural, Philosophical, Scientific, and Aesthetic Foundations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), xvi-xvii.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 6-10.

<sup>23</sup> Emma Jones Lapsansky, "Past Plainness to Present Simplicity: A Search for Quaker Identity," in Lapsansky and Verplanck, 2-3.

<sup>24</sup> Scholars seem to use the terms "Inward" and "Inner" interchangeably when referring to a Quaker's personal experience with God.



conspicuous consumption.<sup>25</sup> The degree to which Quakers were unique among Christian groups is a topic for further debate, but it did not appear to factor into the daily lives of the Quaker women studied here. The Philadelphia Quaker community was a necessary point of reference for piety in the absence of extensive theological texts that discussed plainness explicitly, which meant that meetings and social gatherings were crucial to women's material worlds and religious experiences.

Elite Philadelphia Quaker women participated in cultural shifts that extended beyond the Society of Friends, but in ways that included the practice of plainness. Hannah Callender and her friend Elizabeth Sandwith, both of whom were contemporaries of Grace Peel, had many social engagements that correlated with the concept of sociability. Sociability, or friendships between men and women that often led to courtship in early America, required broad reading in subjects such as art and politics. Ideally, the conversations facilitated learning and cemented community ties.<sup>26</sup> Historians Susan Klepp and Karin Wulf discuss the importance of social conversations in Callender's world extensively, but they do not address possible divergences between Quaker social practices and those of other Philadelphians outside of the Society of Friends. While not necessarily Quaker, the parameters of sociability accommodated Quaker theology and interacted with it in unique ways, since speaking was just as important as listening during social visits. Through eloquent conversations in heterosocial settings around the tea table, these women cultivated their inner worlds within the framework of speech and silence.

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<sup>25</sup> Lapsansky in Lapsansky and Verplanck, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Klepp and Wulf, 28-29.

Hannah Callender's diary portrays a devout Quaker woman whose worldly proclivities attest to the flexibility of the concept of plainness within the referential framework of social settings. Beginning at the age of twenty-one on the first of the year 1758, Callender intended for her diary to help her manage her time and keep track of her countless social visits.<sup>27</sup> Prior to starting her diary, Callender studied at Anthony Benezet's Quaker school with Elizabeth Sandwith. Callender's father had a subscription to the Library Company of Philadelphia, which facilitated her frequent reading. She enjoyed fine art, landscapes, and architecture, and was skilled at needlework.<sup>28</sup> Despite her piety, she also struggled with plainness as it related to silence and personal behavior.<sup>29</sup> Her upbringing within Philadelphia's elite circles likely allowed her the time and resources to learn and visit as much as she did.

Speech, the counterpart to silence in Quaker theology, was a common feature of Callender's many social interactions. Between silent meetings, Callender and her friends exchanged ideas about inward and outward piety for men and women through gossip. During a February 1758 visit with A. James, for example, she noted that, "some men take great liberty in laughing at the Women, however, not being clear of failings themselves, and in a general way, we getting the right side of them; make me think of an old saying 'let them laugh that Wins.'" Perhaps Callender meant that men were hypocrites, especially since women got what they wanted from men regardless. The following day, she and some female friends denounced large age differences between married couples, especially in the case of two of their peers who announced their intent to marry at meeting.<sup>30</sup> While these

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<sup>27</sup> Klepp and Wulf, 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 12-13.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>30</sup> Diary of Hannah Callender Sansom, February 1758, in Klepp and Wulf, 48.

conversations do not read as specifically Quaker gossip, they most likely reinforced Quaker social norms. The gender dynamics that Callender described do not seem explicitly Quaker, but her concerns regarding age gaps may relate to the longevity of the marriages of her peers. To Quakers, marriage within meeting was crucial.<sup>31</sup>

Callender's disdain for ostentatious behavior is clear throughout her writing. While she visited G. Allison in April 1758, she met "a Coxcomb there, one of the most disagreeable [sic] things in nature. *Monkeys in action, Peroquets in talk / They are crowned with feathers like the cock a too [sic] / And like camelions [sic] daily change there [sic] hue.*"<sup>32</sup> In this instance, a coxcomb, or vain man, is an object of reproach. Monkeys are creatures with similarities to humans who sometimes mime human behaviors, while parrots imitate human speech. Cockatoos wear gaudy feathers, and chameleons change their appearance as they please. This comparison of conceited men to animals relates to the practice of plainness because those who were not plain merely imitated proper behaviors, thereby obscuring their inner vapidity. Plain dress, much like these animal comparisons, could disguise the lack of piety of the Friend who wore it.

Callender's disapproval of vanity extended to women as well. While visiting her friend Becky in November 1758, she stitched a piece of needlework while Becky read from Samuel Richardson's non-Quaker 1748 novel *Clarissa; or, The History of a Young Lady*. Callender concluded from the novel that, "a fallen woman is the more

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<sup>31</sup> J. William Frost, "Changing Quaker Ideals for Material Culture," in Lapsansky and Verplanck, 25.

<sup>32</sup> Diary of Hannah Callender Sansom, February 1758, in Klepp and Wulf, 53. Neither Klepp nor Wulf nor I could find this poem anywhere else, so it might be an original composition.

inexcusable as from the cradle the Sex is warned against them.”<sup>33</sup> The next day, Callender noted that at meeting, she sat near Patty Loyd and one of Dr. Shippen’s daughters, who were “two celebrated beauties” at the time. She approved of Ms. Shippen’s actions more than she did for Patty, “who has been brought up to think she can have no action or gesture that looks amiss. when on the contrary: *I hate the Face however fair, / That carries an affected air, / The lisping tone, the shape constrain’d, / Are fopperies which only tend, / To injure what they strive to mend.*” This quote from an Edward Moore poem in *Fables for Ladies* condemns foppish behavior for women as well as for men.<sup>34</sup> In the context of plainness, silence, and the integral role of personal behavior to these beliefs, Callender used worldly, non-Quaker literary sources to record how her peers did or did not conform to her ideas about proper behavior. To Callender, women who exhibited ostentatious outward appearance and behaviors were much like the Coxcomb – immoral and worthy of reproach. She did, however, note when she thought other women enacted piety correctly.

In September 1758, Hannah Callender recorded the plain outfit and demeanor of her peer Betsey Brook in great detail, highlighting the visual and behavioral components of plainness. Callender did not note what parts of Brook’s outfit were especially plain; rather, the quiet piety of this young woman’s demeanor combined with her practical, unadorned dress left a lasting impression on Callender. At meeting on that September day, Callender and her friend Sally noticed a girl they knew escorting a stranger, later introduced as Betsey Brook, out of the building. They inquired after the girl’s health and a conversation followed. Brook was only seventeen, but her physical beauty,

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<sup>33</sup> Diary of Hannah Callender Sansom, February 1758, in Klepp and Wulf, 77.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

manners, and plainness were those of a more mature woman. Callender noted that this visitor from Maryland's "dress was plain, and something particular from us: yet coud [sic] not be altered in her, without robing [sic] her of a beauty, which seemed intirely [sic] her peculiar, a cambletee riding gound [sic], stomerger (stomacher) [sic] of the same, a white silk lace x and x before it, a peek cornered sinkle hankercheif [sic] tucked in it, a round eared cap, with a little black silk hood, graced as Innocent a face, as I ever see, when a walking she wore a Plat bonnet."<sup>35</sup> Callender usually did not describe the clothing of other people in her diary, so her notation of the "cambletee" fabric may have been notable for its plainness.

Callender's description of Brook's clothing may indicate what Philadelphia Quakers considered plain textiles. The "cambletee rideing gound" with matching "stomerger" was most likely a gown made entirely of camlet, which was a lightweight plain weave wool fabric with many uses. This textile came in many different patterns and finishes, and early Americans used it for everything from upholstery and furnishing textiles to clothing for men and women.<sup>36</sup> Callender did not write if this fabric had a pattern woven into it, or if Brook wore any ornamentation beyond the white silk on her stomacher. Since the visitor's appearance left such an impression, we can infer that perhaps there was no noticeable, ostentatious pattern to the camlet. Additionally, Brook probably wore a

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<sup>35</sup> Diary of Hannah Callender Sansom, September 1758, in Klepp and Wulf, 69-70.

<sup>36</sup> Christina J. Hodge, *Consumerism and the Emergence of the Middle Class in Colonial America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 138.

Adrienne D. Hood, *The Weaver's Craft: Cloth, Commerce, and Industry in Early Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 160.

riding gown because she was visiting from Maryland, which implies that plain dress allowed for the pious to wear clothing made for specific situations. Most importantly, Brook's outfit was plain in the context of her pious demeanor.

In addition to women's accounts of their social visits, portraiture offers further insight into how women interpreted plainness in their physical appearances and behavior. Grace Peel Dowell Parr's portrait hangs in the galleries at the Winterthur Museum, where it testifies to the personal interpretation of plainness in the patronage of fine art. According to Peel's probate inventory, she possessed many luxury goods. By the time she passed away in Lancaster in 1814, she owned a damask tablecloth, several pieces of mahogany furniture, countless household textiles, and a total of four portraits. The portrait of Peel's first husband, William Dowell, is the only painting listed in the inventory with a named subject.<sup>37</sup> Many of these objects would strike readers as not plain due to their luxury, as in the case of the mahogany and the portraits, or their sheer abundance, as in the case of the textiles. However, upon further investigation, this portrait reveals the individual interpretation inherent to plainness as a rhetorical position.

By the eighteenth century, Quakers began to embrace portraiture as an appropriate material possession to both commission and own. According to art historian Dianne C. Johnson, early Quaker writing indicated disapproval of portraiture as a vain pursuit. However, by the eighteenth century, Quakers began to see portraying themselves as a reflection of their secular and religious prosperity.<sup>38</sup> By the 1750s, around the time that fellow Quaker Benjamin West painted Peel's portrait, Friends

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<sup>37</sup> Probate inventory for Grace Parr in Object file for Object ID 2003.63. Winterthur Museum.

<sup>38</sup> Dianne C. Johnson, "Living in the Light: Quakerism and Colonial Portraiture," in Lapsansky and Verplanck, 122-123.

began to move away from the plainness of their predecessors in favor of material possessions that correlated with an individual's interpretation of his or her Inner Light.<sup>39</sup> At a glance, this portrait looks much like others of this time period that were not Quaker; however, Peel and West included distinctly Quaker characteristics in this painting. Grace Peel may have worn a gown without patterned textiles or ornamentation in order to ensure that she would not appear out of fashion in a few years. However, her dress also correlates with the few written Quaker recommendations found in the *Rules of Discipline* regarding plain dress.

At some meetings, Friends contributed thoughts on what behaviors should constitute disciplines of the church, and these thoughts were compiled and published as the *Rules of Discipline*. The behaviors that these publications describe were not mandated for Friends, but they reflect the community input that was crucial to plainness. Despite the faith's supposedly non-hierarchical structure, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting took its cues from the London Yearly Meeting. London stated in 1691 that Friends should "avoid pride and immodesty in apparel, and all vain and superfluous fashions of the world." In 1703, they advised, "that all who make profession with us take care to be exemplary in what they wear, and what they use, so as to avoid the vain customs of the world, and all extravagancy in colour and fashion."<sup>40</sup> The 1711 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Rules of Discipline offered specific advice to avoid "gaudy stomachers" and textiles with floral or striped patterns.<sup>41</sup> In 1719, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting began

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<sup>39</sup> Johnson in Lapsansky and Verplanck, 145.

<sup>40</sup> London Yearly Meeting, *Rules of Discipline* (London: Darton and Harvey, 1834), 206-208.

<sup>41</sup> Caton in Lapsansky and Verplanck, 249.

assembling their annotated rules of discipline into manuscripts to be sent to smaller quarterly and monthly meetings, where the information was then distributed to Friends.<sup>42</sup> It is unclear from her sparse archival records if Peel ever saw one of these publications. Regardless, she wears neither of the explicitly mentioned garments, and her gown of high-quality silk is cut in simple lines in a style that changed little over the course of the eighteenth century. Her neckerchief and lack of hair powder further mark her as a young, pious Quaker.<sup>43</sup> Although plain dress was not mandated, it still marked especially pious Quakers.

Benjamin West's early portraits may illuminate how his artistic influences affected his portrayal of Grace Peel. Born in Springfield, Pennsylvania in 1738, West was just beginning his career as a painter and was probably the same age as his subjects when he painted portraits of Grace and her sister Elizabeth Peel in 1757 or 1758.<sup>44</sup> He received his early instruction from English emigrant painter William Williams around 1747, and his early influences included the work of well-known colonial artists such as John Wollaston, Robert Feke, and both Gustavus and John Hesselius. The portraits that he painted before leaving the colonies in 1760 to train in Europe were representative of other colonial portraits by artists including and in addition to those listed above.<sup>45</sup> Like his contemporaries, West may have altered a dress that he painted in another portrait to make it plain for Grace Peel.

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<sup>42</sup> "An Inventory of Friends Historical Library's Collection of Quaker Disciplines, 1689-2009," Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed 6 May 2019,

<http://www.swarthmore.edu/library/friends/Disciplines.xml>.

<sup>43</sup> Caton in Lapsansky and Verplanck, 248.

<sup>44</sup> Object file for Object ID 2003.63. Winterthur Museum.

<sup>45</sup> "Benjamin West (1738-1820)," Worcester Art Museum, accessed 6 May 2019,

[https://www.worcesterart.org/collection/Early\\_American/Artists/west/biography/index.html](https://www.worcesterart.org/collection/Early_American/Artists/west/biography/index.html).



Provenance information ties this portrait of another woman in a yellow gown to Benjamin West. Little is known about this portrait, except that it changed hands very few times between its creation and its arrival at the National Gallery of Art. Mary Bethel Boude's descendant, Elizabeth F.G. Heistand (b. 1872) of Pennsylvania sold the painting in New York in 1947, and Edgar William and Bernice Chrysler Garbisch purchased it soon after. They owned it for sixteen years before donating it to the National Gallery of Art in 1964, where it remains.<sup>46</sup> Considering its clear path from Pennsylvania to Washington, D.C., it appears likely that West painted this conventional portrait during his early years working in Pennsylvania.

The similarities between West's portrait of Mary Bethel Boude and his later portrait of Grace Peel Dowell Parr may illuminate how West combined portraiture conventions with plain dress. Both portraits employ conventional poses, serene facial expressions, garment styles, and accessories. Both subjects wear yellow gowns with little ornament and drape billowing fabric at their elbows. However, Boude's hair curls over her shoulder, unobstructed by a capelet. While both women wear ruffles at their necklines, Boude also wears ornamental ruffles on her sleeves. A small pink bow at the center of Boude's neckline constitutes the only other ornament on her outfit. The background of Boude's portrait is an outdoor scene, whereas Peel's has an unadorned dark background. Peel's lack of sleeve ruffles, loose hair, and ornamental bows may reveal her interpretation of the *Rules of Discipline* just as much as it may reveal West's artistic choices.

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<sup>46</sup> Mary Bethel Boude (Mrs. Samuel Boude), "National Gallery of Art, accessed 6 May 2019, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.50265.html>.

West most likely painted portraits of Grace Peel and her sister Elizabeth Peel as a pair, and their simultaneous creation may indicate the coexistence of multiple material interpretations of plainness. According to Winterthur's object file for Grace Peel's portrait, West may have painted this pair of portraits before the sisters married their husbands. Elizabeth Peel married Francis Harris in 1758, which correlates with the dates currently assigned to both portraits.<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth's depiction in her portrait bears similarities to that of her sister with the lack of ornamentation on her silk gown. Gauzy ruffles on her neckline, choker, and cap constitute the only embellishments for her outfit. Unlike her sister, Elizabeth holds a small basket of pink flowers against a vaguely pastoral background. Perhaps, like other women her age who had likenesses painted before marriage, Elizabeth wished to portray her potential fecundity by holding flowers near her abdomen.<sup>48</sup> While Elizabeth and Grace look quite different in their portraits, their garments still correlate with the few specifications listed in the *Rules of Discipline*, which further indicates the coexistence of different, yet not dissimilar, individual interpretations of plainness in dress and fine art.

London Yearly Meeting lamented the downfall of young Friends who abandoned plainness in their deportment a few years before West painted the Peel sisters' portraits around 1757, which may indicate part of the motivation for the commission. In 1743, London warned the faithful about serving as examples of plain dress and speech for younger Quakers. London Yearly

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<sup>47</sup> John Hamel, "A New American Portrait by Benjamin West," (2000): 16, in Object file for Object ID 2003.63. Winterthur Museum.

<sup>48</sup> For more discussion of a fertility shift in early America and its display in portraiture, see Susan E. Klepp, *Revolutionary Conceptions: Women, Fertility, & Family Limitation in America, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute and University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

Meeting advised, “[l]et not any such as degenerate in these respects excuse their own weakness, under a pretence of the misconduct of some, who have appeared outwardly plain; an objection of very little weight [...] the very reason why deceivers sometimes put on plain apparel, is, because true men have been accustomed to wear it.” They also warned against lapses in plain speech, which was “a practice of very ill example to our observing youth.”<sup>49</sup> Quakers who wore plain dress were not automatically pious and speaking like a non-Quaker worsened the hypocrisy that Quaker children, the future of the faith, would see as an example. It is unclear when Grace Peel was born, but considering her marriage in 1762, she was probably in her late teens or early twenties when this portrait was painted. Even though she may not have read the 1743 disciplines, the ideas in this document persisted into the nineteenth century. When she died in 1814, she willed all of her possessions, including her portraits, to seven female family members.<sup>50</sup> Perhaps Grace Peel, although an unmarried young woman herself around 1757, sought to memorialize her own youthful piety as an example to the Friends who followed her.<sup>51</sup>

Philadelphia Quaker women enacted plainness within community ties forged not only through social interactions and literary culture, but in their own work

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<sup>49</sup> London Yearly Meeting, *Rules of Discipline* (London: Darton and Harvey, 1834), 209-210.

<sup>50</sup> John Hamel, “A New American Portrait by Benjamin West,” (2000): 14, in Object file for Object ID 2003.63. Winterthur Museum.

<sup>51</sup> Peel is spelled as “Peal” in Christ Church and Saint Peters records. Grace Peel married William Dowell on 18 May 1762 in Philadelphia. “Pennsylvania Marriages, 1709-1940,” database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:V26S-P3T> : 11 February 2018), William Dowell and Grace Peal, 18 May 1762; citing Christ Church And Saint Peters, Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; FHL microfilm 1,490,578.

producing material goods for their friends and families. Hannah Callender and her friend Elizabeth Sandwith both made clothing and accessories, such as purses, for family and friends. Neither woman commented on the plainness of the things that they made, nor did they indicate monetary compensation for their work. Both women were young, unmarried, and wealthy during the period from 1758 to 1760, and Callender lived with her parents, indicating that they likely did not need to make their own clothing or sell goods to make ends meet. Additionally, they most likely learned how to sew and embroider from their female relatives and teachers as an essential part of housekeeping and housewifery.<sup>52</sup> Like women of other religious denominations in eighteenth-century America, Quakers expected their wives to perform household duties.<sup>53</sup> Before they married their husbands and had children, Callender and Sandwith both had the time and resources to make things for themselves and others. The repeated exchanges of goods likely strengthened social bonds within the Quaker community because this gifting happened over the course of women's friendships and when someone experienced a milestone, such as the birth of a baby.<sup>54</sup> The time necessary to create these objects spread out over days, weeks, and years, interwoven with the minutiae of everyday life.

Elizabeth Sandwith, one of the most well-known Quaker women of Revolutionary America, often created

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<sup>52</sup> For discussion of women's domestic productions for themselves and their peers, as well as recordings of compensation for this work in the eighteenth century, see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

<sup>53</sup> J. William Frost, *The Quaker Family in Colonial America: A Portrait of the Society of Friends* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 183.

<sup>54</sup> Unbound typescripts of diaries, 1758-1801 (undated), page 1, boxes 1-2, Coll. 1760, Elizabeth Sandwith Drinker diaries, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

things for others during the early years of her diary. She kept track of her “Work done in part of ye Years: 1757, 1758: 1759: 1760,” during which she made several small pieces adorned with “Irish stitch,” a common angular decorative embroidery stitch used on pocketbooks.<sup>55</sup> She wrote down what she made and for whom she made it, such as when she stated that she “Work’d a Irish stitch Pocket Book for Cat’n Morgan” and “A Double Pocket Book, in Irish stitch for Peggy Parr.”<sup>56</sup> Sandwith also made Irish stitch pincushions, garters, needle books, and even a tea kettle holder for people in her community.<sup>57</sup> Because Sandwith did not incorporate this list of her work into her daily diary entries until around the time she borrowed Callender’s diary in 1760, it is difficult to determine the amount of time Sandwith required to make these embroidered objects.<sup>58</sup>

Sandwith’s use of Irish stitch indicates her participation in aesthetic trends in decorative arts that both extended beyond the Quaker community and corresponded with the practice of plainness and silence. Today, “Irish stitch” is known as bargello work. Historically, it has also been known as flame stitch, Hungarian point, and Florentine work. This type of decorative needlework developed in Florence during the Renaissance to decorate upholstery fabric. Its main features include vertical stitches on a canvas that “form regular peaks and valleys.”<sup>59</sup> This style of embroidery features on early American

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<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Sandwith Drinker diaries, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* Peggy Parr may have been a relation of Grace Peel Dowell Parr.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Klepp and Wulf, 4.

<sup>59</sup> “Embroidery styles: an illustrated guide,” Victoria and Albert Museum, accessed 2 April 2019,

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/embroidery-styles-an-illustrated-guide>.

pocketbooks from New England and the Mid-Atlantic, and it was not necessarily a Quaker stitch.<sup>60</sup> As with many other everyday objects that Callender and Sandwith wrote about in their diaries, these things were not immediately legible as Quaker. The act of exchanging one of these pocketbooks, which would look like any other pocketbook to colonists outside of the Quaker community, was what made it plain. An object was distinctly Quaker within the context of its creation and exchange.

The things that Sandwith made do not stand out for their plainness, but rather for the social context of their creation and the possible pious intention behind them. Returning to Garfinkel's argument for silence as the most important Quaker expressive behavior and plainness as a "rhetorical stance" rather than an adjective, it follows that plainness could have undergirded Sandwith's creation of pocketbooks and pincushions.<sup>61</sup> If Sandwith's pocketbooks were like other contemporary regional examples, such as figures 4 and 5, then they likely attested to the use of worldly material vocabularies to practice Quaker belief by providing peers with useful belongings. Sandwith embroidered useful things with other stitches, such as queen stitch, which she used to adorn a pincushion for herself and pocketbooks for Mary Searle and Peggy Parr.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, she made pincushions, watch strings, and stockings. She seemed to integrate beauty with utility and quality materials, as other Quakers did when they clothed themselves and furnished their homes under the guise of using the best materials, but in a plain manner. By extending her silent production of material goods to her

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<sup>60</sup> Neither the V&A article cited above, nor auction listings for figure 2 nor figure 3 specify that this stitch was specific to Quaker material culture.

<sup>61</sup> Garfinkel in Lapsansky and Verplanck, 66-69.

<sup>62</sup> Unbound typescripts of diaries, 1758-1801 (undated), page 2, boxes 1-2, Coll. 1760, Elizabeth Sandwith Drinker diaries, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

peers, Sandwith practiced plainness as a way of being through production and work.

Hannah Callender did similar work for herself as well as for friends and family, but her diary gives a more detailed overview of the time and labor that went into her production of material goods. At the beginning of her diary, Callender mentions over the course of weeks and months how she worked on her “piece,” which Klepp and Wulf note was an intricate embroidered image of a lion that is not extant.<sup>63</sup> She began working on it in January 1758, and she referred to it only as her “Piece.” On several days, she stated only that she was “at Work at [her] peice [sic].”<sup>64</sup> She mentioned working on it most days until she finally completed her “Lyon Peice [sic]” in the third week of May 1758.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps she derived the image from the Bible, or even English heraldry. Considering her feelings of “filial reverance [sic]” toward England at this point in her life, this steady work may have been a way for her to be an industrious, pious English subject.<sup>66</sup> There is no indication of the size or intricacy of this piece, especially since she did not specify how long she spent working on it on the days that she did other things besides embroidery. Much like the other things she sewed over the course of her diary, the creation of the lion piece was interwoven with the events of Callender’s everyday life.

At a glance, Callender wrote about making her own clothing more than Sandwith did; however, she also consistently made things for friends and family. Callender spent a great deal of her time with her friend Caty throughout 1758, and this friendship involved reading,

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<sup>63</sup> Klepp and Wulf, 45.

<sup>64</sup> Diary of Hannah Callender Sansom in Klepp and Wulf, 45-46.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, February 1758, in Klepp and Wulf, 48.

shopping, traveling, going to meeting, and sewing together. In September of that year, she often wrote that she was either “at work helping Caty” or “at work for Caty.” Caty also helped her, such as when they placed Callender’s mother’s black russell quilt in a frame and both worked on it. Together, they were able to finish the quilt in a few weeks.<sup>67</sup> Shortly after recovering from the measles in March 1759, Callender proceeded to make shirts for Caty. Each of these only took about two days, and she simultaneously worked on shirts and handkerchiefs for her father, as well as shifts for her mother.<sup>68</sup> Much like Sandwith’s account of what she made for whom, Callender also kept track of what she made for the people within her social and family circles.

In addition to making useful garments for friends and family, Callender also sewed as an act of charity, much like other wealthy colonial women. In April 1759, she stated that she had begun “the first of 2 shirts for Elisa Rue a poor woman.” Later that week, she “finished the 2 Shirts, made a couple of hankercheifs [sic] for a poor woman.”<sup>69</sup> It is unclear if this poor woman was a Friend, since only her poverty appears in the diary. Perhaps Callender sewed for friends and family as a quiet act of plainness, and she had similar pious motivations when she sewed for charity. She did not mention any affiliation with others who did charity work in her community, which implies that perhaps her Inner Light directed her to care for people she knew as well as those less fortunate through useful material goods. Overall, Callender did not record sewing for charity as much as she did for friends and family, which further confirms the social and familial relationships that

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<sup>67</sup> Diary of Hannah Callender Sansom in Klepp and Wulf, 67-68, 73-75.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 95-99.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 98-99.



circumscribed the ways in which she enacted plainness through her creation of things.

Whether through portraiture, writing, social engagements, or the sewing necessary for housekeeping, eighteenth-century Philadelphia Quaker women lived the tenet of plainness as material experiences. These women saw ostentatious attitude, clothing, and behavior as indicative of a lack of morality, but they saw social engagements, commissioning art, reading, writing, and making clothing and accessories for themselves and others as acceptable Quaker activities. These scenarios were not lapses of faith, but rather a set of behaviors necessary for and aligned with a religion that did not separate secular and religious life. Piety was just as much about one's outward appearance as it was about proper behavior within circumscribed social contexts.

Grace Peel, Hannah Callender, and Elizabeth Sandwith did not separate the art, literature, and objects of their daily lives into Quaker and non-Quaker categories. Rather, like other Protestants, their worldly pursuits fit within boundaries of acceptable material possessions because of individual interpretations. Sources such as the *Rules of Discipline*, Peel's portrait, Callender's social visits, and both Callender and Sandwith's production of clothing and accessories reveal the components of plainness as a religious tenet based not only on pious behavior and unadorned appearances, but also the creation and exchange of goods within social circles that reinforced the aesthetic boundaries of plainness. Many aspects of these examples appear to be worldly on the surface, but they existed and continue to exist in the secular and religious environment of Quaker daily life. For eighteenth-century Philadelphia Quaker women, plainness was a

rhetorical stance that depended upon context to give pious meaning to their material worlds.