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Quakers and Disability: Theory and Practice in the 19th Century

Timothy Lillie

Abstract

During the 19th century, the Religious Society of Friends, or Quakers, were among the religious groups of the time who made sure to "take care of their own," by ensuring that sick, dependent, or disabled members of their congregations who came to their official attention were cared for. The Quaker process was heavily influenced by the book of discipline that each Yearly Meeting adopted as a set of rules for living for their members and that particularly described ways of dealing with the poor. This paper examines the Quakers of the early to mid-19th century, elements of the discipline of Indiana Yearly Meeting in particular, and examines the case of Samuel Price, who was supported as an "insane person" for 45 years. Use and interpretation of formal entries in the minutes of some parts of the Society of Friends in Indiana, in those days, is an important part of understanding what happened to Price, since the nature and extent of recording practices was deeply culturally embedded in the practices of Quakers who lived in a manner similar to that of Amish cultures in the 21st century. The paper touches on changes in the Midwestern culture that surrounded the Friends and how it affected them. Some indications of parallels for today are also examined.

Keywords

Quakers, Society of Friends, disability, legalism, religion

Quakers and Disability: Theory and Practice in the 19th Century

Timothy Lillie

The Religious Society of Friends, better known generally as Quakers, were formed during the ferment of the English Civil war and Commonwealth period, as an explicitly Christian and intensely evangelical religious group, dedicated to the idea that they had discovered anew the one true Christian religion and that, given time, the whole world would eventually agree (sources are listed at the end of this section). A number of Quaker missionaries, called collectively "The Valiant Sixty", and consisting of both men and women (highly unusual for the time) went forth all over England and to other parts of the world, including a visit to the Ottoman Sultan, with the avowed desire to convert him to Quakerism.

The two most prominent Quakers of the early days were George Fox and James Nayler, who were also rivals in the leadership role of the early days. Fox, in particular, is noted for his oft-quoted search for a religious experience that would speak to his "condition" and particularly noted that he had heard "a voice" speaking to him, while he was pondering his difficulties on Pendle Hill. That voice, he reported informed him that "There is one, even Christ Jesus, who can speak to thy condition." Fox reports that when he heard the voice "[His] heart did leap for joy." Nayler was eventually tried for blasphemy by Parliament, whipped, had his tongue bored through with a red hot poker, and a "B" (for blasphemer) branded on his forehead. Both of these men, in the early days of the Quaker movement, were activists who often paid the price for their constant and continual disruption of the society of the time; the first 40 years of the Quaker movement was that of a counter-cultural phenomenon. Friends were specifically called to preach equality of men and women and, later, equality of all people; they were early (though not

originally) called to proclaim the modern pacifist creed by which they are typically best known; and they believed that preaching and ministry ought to be free; that "hirelings" (that is, paid ministers or pastors or priests) ought not be employed by Christians and that too much formal or book learning was likely to be not a good thing in helping one develop spiritually. This created a mystical and religious experience based on internal religious experiences, tempered with reference to the Bible and elders, that was learned almost by a sort of osmosis.¹

Quakers became more respectable in the late 17th century (often, the passing of the Toleration Act in 1689, which made it possible for Quakers to affirm, instead of swear, and which tolerated them and other groups, is cited as a turning point) and, as a result, were concerned for their individual and corporate reputations. Thus, it became important to know who was or was not officially recognized as a Quaker. Much rested on this decision, since as social outcasts the Quakers could not count on receiving public charity and had to depend on each other. If a valued member of a congregation (called, variously, a Monthly Meeting or Preparative Meeting, generally "Monthly Meeting" in America) became in need of support of a financial nature the other members of the Monthly Meeting were expected to support him or her and, sometimes, entire families in need as well. Thus, formal recorded membership became necessary to distinguish who was qualified for support by the local Meeting from who was not. Of course, those who were considered to be members of the Monthly Meeting were expected to conform to the rules and beliefs of the group in order to be considered worthy.² Books of discipline (written collections of advice and rules for living that were developed and adopted by Yearly Meetings) began to spring up at about the same time that the third generation of Quakers (about 1725 or

¹ F. Taber, "Conservative Friends' Witness for Today". (*The Conservative Friend, a publication of Ohio Yearly Meeting of Friends*, 2009).

² L. Kuenning, *The Old Discipline: Nineteenth-Century Friends Disciplines in America*, Glenside PA (Quaker Heritage Press 1999).

1730) inherited the mantle of the earlier generations. These had slightly varying forms, but generally consisted of a set of beliefs that knit Quakers together including such items as plain speech and dress, prohibition of swearing and anything to do with the military, and marriage rules and forms.

By that time, Quakers had mostly achieved a respectability that was to continue more-or-less unabated for the next two hundred and fifty years. Much of the respectability was due to the formation of a "hedge" around Meeting members and, in particular, children, who were expected to also be registered as members of the Society, typically at birth. The practice of birthright membership has generally been discontinued by the Society of Friends, except that Ohio Yearly Meeting, in its most recent Book of Discipline, continues to allow it.³

Discipline in early to mid 19th century Friends organizations

The section from the 19th century discipline, of Indiana Yearly Meeting, quoted here in full, will provide the reader with an idea of the clear expectations for behavior that were held by the weightiest (that is, most influential) Friends and the conformity to such that the poor (including disabled Friends) were supposed to show:

POOR

As mercy, compassion and charity are eminently required by the gospel, it is the desire of the Yearly Meeting that the cases of our members who are in indigent circumstances be duly inspected, in order that advice and relief may be seasonably extended, and assistance afforded them in such business as they are capable of. To defray the expenses which their support and the education of their children will necessarily occasion, it is recommended to each Monthly or Preparative Meeting of men and

³ E. Russell, *The history of Quakerism*, New York (Macmillan 1943); H. Brinton, *Friends for 300 years: The history and beliefs of the Society of Friends since George Fox started the Quaker Movement*, Wallingford PA (Pendle Hill Publications, 1952-65); T. Hamm, *The transformation of American Quakerism: Orthodox Friends, 1800-1907*, Bloomington (Indiana University Press, 1988); W. Taber, *The eye of faith: A history of Ohio Yearly Meeting, Conservative*, Barnesville OH (Representative Meeting of Ohio Yearly Meeting, Religious Society of Friends 1988); F. Taber, "Conservative Friends' Witness for Today." (*The Conservative Friend, a publication of Ohio Yearly Meeting of Friends*, 2009).

women Friends, to be open-hearted and liberal in subscriptions for raising and continuing funds for these purposes. And, in the exercise of this benevolent care, it is desired that we may always guard against unnecessarily exposing the names or situations of our fellow-members. Such, also, who need pecuniary aid, ought to accept the deliberate advice of their friends, and manifest a becoming disposition to conform to their solid judgment, remembering that it is said, "in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." – Prov. 11:14.

Where there is an obstinate refusal to conform to such advice, committees are to be governed, in the distribution of the intended liberality, by a prudent discretion.⁴

This passage clearly sends messages about both the behaviors of the giver and of the receiver of aid. The giver is expected to be generous and to consider the needs of the children of the poor (or at least those attached to the Monthly meeting) while the receiver was supposed to listen to and follow the good advice of the generous giver. In neither of these roles is there expectation that the receiver ought to be consulted; in fact, a receiver who refuses to listen to advice might, it seems, be cut off by the committees charged with their care and maintenance. Either the indigent or otherwise needy member conformed to the expectations of the Monthly Meeting (and likely the committee that was appointed by that group to oversee your relief) or he or she was cut off financially and, perhaps, socially and emotionally as well. The ultimate sanction of a Friends meeting was disownment or its equivalent. This was often the result of violations of the discipline such as marrying out of the meeting or, sometimes, marrying without the consent of the meeting or of the others who were expected to give consent. Occasionally people might be disowned for other reasons, such as watching the militia drill (seen as giving support to military preparations) or in some cases for more substantial reasons. Charles Coffin was disowned by his monthly meeting for being involved in a financial scandal in the late 19th century.⁵

⁴ Kuenning, *supra* note 2 at 302.

⁵ Charles Coffin typescript autobiography, Earlham College Archives.

However, disownment was not an awful fate, since it extended, pretty much entirely by the 19th century, to the inability of the person proceeded against to take part in the business meetings (both men's and women's) that existed to do the business of the monthly meeting.

On the other hand, if one was financially dependent in whole or in part on the largesse of the monthly meeting, and one was disowned, the control would extend beyond social concerns only, and could be serious.

Indiana Yearly Meeting and Quakerism

Until the early part of the 19th century, there were few Quakers west of the Alleghenies. Most lived in New England, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and North Carolina. There were fairly sizable groups of Quakers in Georgia and Virginia as well, but they were not large enough to sustain the impact of being themselves persecuted by neighbors for opposition to slavery. They (along with many North Carolina Quakers) migrated to what was then "The West," including Ohio and Indiana, in particular. The organization of Friends (monthly, quarterly and yearly meeting) seems to have been mostly influenced by the actions and movements of Friends from Baltimore Yearly Meeting, who set up Quarterly meetings of that group in the late 18th and early 20th century in western Pennsylvania, and eastern Ohio. Eventually, in 1813, Baltimore Yearly Meeting gave its consent for the "setting off" or establishing of Ohio Yearly Meeting, which, in turn and in time, set off Indiana Yearly Meeting.

Until the major Orthodox/Hicksite splits of 1827 and 1828, American Quakerism was essentially unified in theology, beliefs, and most behaviors. However, after that time it was not uncommon for (in some Yearly Meetings) to see not only splits of Yearly Meetings into Hicksite and Orthodox groups, but splits at the Quarterly and, critically, the Monthly Meeting level as

well. The monthly meeting was the basic organization of Quakers: the local congregation, and the body which provided support and relief, when needed, and the body that determined membership in the Society of Friends.⁶ While there are some official records that examine how a number of monthly meeting dealt with providing support for specific individuals spread out here and there in the Quaker archives searched, the case of Samuel Price, of Blue River Monthly Meeting, part of Indiana Yearly Meeting, appears in the minutes of that meeting, over a period of 45 years, and is used as an illustration of how Quakers dealt with disability in the 19th century. It is also useful when taking side ventures from Price's case, to describe how the Society of Friends and Indiana were changing during his life.

The Case of Samuel Price

In the minute books of Blue River Monthly Meeting we find the case of Samuel Price, described in formal minutes over the course of many years. The author uses the Price case to discuss the changing Quaker principles and practices over the years that Samuel Price is supported by the Monthly (and later Quarterly) meeting. There is very little that is actually known about Samuel Price, from the records available – but some of the information is tantalizing and some, given an understanding of Quaker methods, can be reconstructed in a plausible, if speculative way. What I have found interesting is that Samuel Price appears in the records of his Monthly Meetings for some 45 years, encompassing the very early, fairly rough, pioneer days of early Indiana all the way up to the Civil War years – when east central Indiana

⁶ Hamm, *supra* note 3.

was a manufacturing hub and when Richmond, Indiana in particular, was considered an advanced and forward-thinking city.⁷

Due to the Orthodox/Hicksite split, the minutes of the Blue River meeting are incomplete; I am using the minutes⁸ of the Hicksite group. They first mention that: "Jehosaphat Morris, Foster Nixon, Micah Newby, Robert Dennis, Marmaduke Coffin, and James Merideth, are appointed to have the care of friends in a suffering condition, and to inform this meeting when necessary." Marmaduke Coffin (who may be from the same prominent Indiana Quaker family as the famous Levi Coffin of the Underground Railroad) was later proceeded against for "departing from plainness in speech and dress and for joining the freemasons in a procession," as recorded in the minutes of 5th month, 5th, 1831, of that same men's meeting.⁹ This would seem to indicate that Coffin decided to rebel against the strictures of the discipline even though he had been earlier charged with being one of the committee to oversee the poor and needy.

What these two entries do show, however, is the typical (and in some quarters continuing) method of Quaker governance, namely by committee (there being no pastors or paid preachers) of members of the meeting and of the importance of that discipline, at this time to Friends. Two responsibilities emerge: that Friends are expected to take part in what other churches might call pastoral duties, towards the poor, and that Friends, even ones with important names, are expected to conform at least outwardly to the precepts of the Book of Discipline. Plainness in speech and dress is examined at some length in the discipline¹⁰ and consisted of a sort of uniform-like mode of dress, in some ways perhaps similar to modern Amish customs, and by use of the first person singular (thee and thou) rather than first person plural (you). Not to

⁷ Minutes of Hicksite meeting

⁸ Minutes of the men's meeting, dated the 4th of 4th month, 1829

⁹ Minutes of the men's meeting, dated the 4th of 4th month, 1829

¹⁰ Kuenning, *supra* note 2 at 298-302.

abide by these was construed as a public break with one's Monthly meeting and dealt with accordingly. The joining of the procession of freemasons was possibly dealt with under "Conduct and Conversation"¹¹ or by "Gaming and Diversions"¹² or possibly "Moderation and Temperance"¹³ or by ignoring the various Advices.¹⁴

The first explicit mention in these minutes of Samuel Price as opposed to a committee of Friends charged with a general obligation to the poor comes from the minutes of the men's meeting, dated the 1st of 1st month, 1831, or New Year's Day (which, incidentally, would not have been celebrated by Friends at this time, nor would any other holiday, since the discipline had a provision against the celebration of "Days and Times" as considering any one day or time as being better or more holy than another):

"This meeting appoints Foster Nixon, Elisha Hobbs, Joshua Trueblood, jr. (sic), Zachariah Nixon, John W. Winslow, Isaac Macy and James Trueblood, to make the necessary inspection relative to Samuel Price's situation, and report to next Monthly meeting."¹⁵ The second mention in these minutes of Samuel Price comes in an extraordinarily long and descriptive (for Quaker business meeting minutes) passage, which is quoted at length here from the minutes of the "Blue river Monthly meeting 5th of 2nd mo. 1831":

"The committee, appointed in the case of Samuel Price, made the following report, which was united with by this meeting viz. 'To Blue river Monthly meeting to be held the 5th of 2nd month 1831. – We, the committee, appointed to take into consideration the case of Samuel Price, agree to make the following report, viz. In the 7th month 1822 he became a charge to this meeting, and so continued to the year 1824. the expence (sic) in that time amounted to one

¹¹ *Ibid* at 237.

¹² *Ibid* at 250.

¹³ *Ibid* at 287.

¹⁴ *Ibid* at 309-310.

¹⁵ Minutes of the men's meeting, dated the 1st of 1st month, 1831.

hundred and thirty two dollars. In 1825. he was judged to be insane by the court of Washington county; by which, Zachariah Nixon, John M. Winslow and Benoni Morris, were appointed his guardians, and they obtained an order of court to sell his land on the best terms to keep him. They sold his land to Jesse Coffin, to keep him five years, and to pay a part of the \$132. which time was out on the 31st of the 12th month, 1830. – We can also inform the meeting, that we have employed John W. Winslow to keep him one year, for the sum of fifty two dollars, if he get no worse. We have employed Jesse Coffin to keep him at 25 cents per day, till John W. Winslow can prepare to keep him. The reason we have no records to show the former proceedings in this case, are, when the Orthodox (so called) withdrew from us, they took the minutes of this meeting.”¹⁶

There are a number of things going on here. First, the committee is reminding the monthly meeting of their continuing responsibility toward Samuel Price and also pointing out that the Orthodox branch apparently were able to avoid being charged with Price’s maintenance. In addition, the committee is pointing out that Price (whose birth is not recorded or lost, but is likely around 1795 or 1796) was indeed maintained by the combined monthly meeting for a couple of years (at the cost of \$132), and that after that, his (that is, Price’s) lands were sold after due legal provisions and arrangements were made for his guardianship. The money was enough, under the understood terms of the missing agreement – which might have been in the minutes of the Orthodox branch) to support Price for five years and to reimburse the monthly meeting for part of their spending before he was adjudicated incompetent. Since there were no asylums in those days and since Price was a member of the Society, and since the meeting had taken on his care, the committee report was to remind the meeting of its responsibilities and to also show that

¹⁶ Blue river Monthly meeting 5th of 2nd mo. 1831.

they had done their job by finding someone to care for Price in both the short term and long term. It is possible that the Jesse Coffin employed to care for Price at the rate of 25 cents per day is the same Jesse Coffin who bought Price's land, some years before. . What is important in terms of disability is that there is both a legalistic reason and a religious reason for the responsibility the monthly meeting feels for him at this time. The way they carry out their responsibilities, over the course of two generations is instructive because these are people who are acting on their professed beliefs, and expect others to do the same.

John W. Winslow is mentioned of course as one of the committee members appointed to figure out how to provide care for Price. Winslow is eventually hired for the care, though with the interesting proviso that he will do so only "if he [Price] get no worse,"¹⁷ which suggests that Price's condition was well known and, perhaps, that it had a bad prognosis. On the other hand, it might have been merely a way for Winslow to prepare against the day that his own costs might go up. More about Winslow later.

It turned out to be a year later, as recorded in the minutes of the monthly meeting of 2nd month 4th, 1832, that "John W. Winslow informed this meeting that he was willing to take charge of Samuel Price another year, for the sum of fifty two dollars. This meeting being satisfied, employs him for that sum and service. James Trueblood and Abram Bundy are appointed to collect and pay over to the said Winslow, the sum of fifty two dollars for the takeing (sic) care of said Price last year; and report to this meeting when complied with."¹⁸ There is, in the minute book, a line under the minute, partly to distinguish one set of minutes from the next but partly, or so it seems, as a sort of visual notice that this particular piece of business had been taken care of, which seems to be seen more frequently as time goes on.

¹⁷ Blue river Monthly meeting 5th of 2nd mo. 1831"

¹⁸ Blue river Monthly meeting 4th of 2nd mo. 1832.

In the minutes of the 2nd of 2nd month, 1833 we read that: "The time in which John W. Winslow was employed to take care of Samuel Price, being out the 12th of this month: the meeting appoints Isaac Macy, Jehoshaphat Morris and James Trueblood to employ some person to take charge of him on behalf of this meeting, the ensuing year, and report to next Monthly meeting."¹⁹

Further: "James Merideth and Elisha Hobbs are appointed to take charge of a subscription, made out in this meeting, to pay John W. Winslow for keeping Samuel Price the past year, and to produce it to a future Monthly meeting."²⁰

The next monthly meeting, which occurred on the 2nd of 3rd month, 1833 recorded that "The Friends continued [that is, the committee appointed the previous month continued in its task] to employ some person to take care of Samuel Price the present year, inform the meeting that John W. Winslow will keep him for the sum of fifty two dollars, if he get no worse; which this meeting approves, and he is employed for that sum and service."²¹ It is not clear, yet, if the meeting was not happy with Winslow's work, since they had (the year before) continued his appointment without setting up a committee to look into finding someone to care for Price; why, then, go through the process of appointing a committee if they were likely to recommend Winslow anyhow? Incidentally, at this same meeting, James Trueblood was appointed clerk of the meeting, equivalent to presiding officer. Remember that earlier, Trueblood was appointed as one of a committee to examine the needs of the poor by this meeting and that John W. Winslow was one of the three people appointed as guardian to Samuel Price, when he still officially owned his farm.

¹⁹ Blue river Monthly meeting 2th of 2nd mo. 1833.

²⁰ Blue river Monthly meeting 2th of 2nd mo. 1833.

²¹ Blue river Monthly meeting 2nd of 3rd month, 1833.

By the meeting of 1st month 4th, 1834, John W. Winslow was, no doubt, glad to see reported that a committee appointed 4th month of 1832 had managed to pay over to him the sum of \$52 "for keeping Samuel Price for the year 1831."²² In short, he was paid more than two years late. However the meeting minutes for that meeting are careful to report that they received a receipt from him for that amount. Apparently, late or low payment for care is not a contemporary issue alone. Later, when the monthly meeting tries and eventually successfully manages to transfer the formal responsibility for raising money to care for Price, it becomes clearer what may be going on: a sort of stinginess on the part of the meeting and a battle of wills between the meeting and John Winslow.

By the meeting held the 6th of second month, 1836, there are three entries, with two signatures of John W. Winslow. The first entry is: "Isaac Macy, Aaron Morris and Joshua Trueblood are appointed to employ some person to keep Samuel Price the ensuing year; also to settle for keeping him the past year."²³ Then follow two receipts, in the minutes of the meeting: the first, signed by Winslow: "Received of Joshua Trueblood jr. on behalf of Blue river Monthly meeting of Friends, ten dollars six and a fourth cents; it being in full of the \$52.00 for keeping Samuel Price the year 1832."²⁴ The second, also signed by Winslow in the minute book: "Also received of Joshua Trueblood jr. on behalf of Blue river Monthly meeting of Friends, three dollars fifty cents: in full of the \$52.00 for keeping Samuel Price the year 1833."²⁵ It is unclear whether or not other sums were paid to Winslow on behalf of Price beyond the amounts noted; it could be that Winslow was at last successful in getting the meeting to pay up the last of what was considered due to him; it could also be that he was taking what he could get. The idea of having

²²Blue River Mountain meeting 1st month 4th, 1834.

²³ Blue River Mountain meeting 6th of second month, 1836

²⁴ Blue River Mountain meeting 6th of second month, 1836

²⁵ Blue River Mountain meeting 6th of second month, 1836

Winslow sign a receipt in the minute book itself seems highly unusual; one wonders if this is a way to settle arguments about money due or not.

However, the committee set up in second month was obliged to report in 3rd month, 1836, that they were unable to complete their task; Abram Bundy was added to the committee and they were asked to report to the next Monthly meeting, which occurred on 4th month 2nd, 1836. At that meeting, the committee reported that Winslow wanted \$75.00 a year to keep Price, but it is asked to continue looking and to report again later. The committee does that at the meeting of 5th month 7th, 1836, where "The committee, on the case of Samuel Price, report that the proposition of John W. Winslow for keeping him at seventy-five dollars a year, is as good as they can do at present: they also desire further indulgence, which the meeting grants; and John W. Winslow is employed to keep said Price at the rate of seventy five dollars a year, beginning at the expiration of the last term until further ordering of the meeting. The said committee is to report to the next monthly meeting."²⁶ Clearly, there is strife arising here: Winslow had just been (apparently) forced to sign receipts clearing the meeting of the costs of Price in previous years (1832 and 1833) and set up a committee to try to find someone else to care for him. They could not find anyone but Winslow, who (one can imagine with a grim smile) offers to do so for half again as much, nearly, as he had agreed to in previous years. The meeting is clearly not happy with having to rely on Winslow, and they ask the committee to find someone else (presumably at a lower rate than Winslow's), even while extending Winslow's employment. Finally, with fairly bad grace the meeting appears to give in: the minutes of 6th month 4th, 1836 state: "The committee continued at last monthly meeting in case of Samuel Price report that they can do no better than to employ John W. Winslow to keep him at \$75.00 the coming year which this

²⁶ Blue River Mountain meeting 7th of fifth month, 1836

meeting unite with and he is employed to that service.”²⁷ Aaron Morris is then appointed to take up a subscription for Price’s care and to pay to Winslow “what he may receive.”²⁸ This seems like a way to force Winslow to take whatever is raised, regardless of what he wants to charge, though it might also merely mean that Morris is to pay directly to Winslow what he is owed, without further bothering the Monthly Meeting. There seems to be no record of what (if anything) Samuel Price felt about all this.

In 2nd month, 4th, 1837, the meeting appointed a committee (including in this case, Winslow) to “take charge of Samuel Price”.²⁹ Because the committee was continued in the meeting of 3rd month, 4th, 1837, and because it included Winslow, one wonders if Friend Winslow was upset and wished to make a point about his potential displeasure with the situation – because, in the meeting of 4th month, 1st, 1837, a Joshua Hilacheck was engaged to “keep him [Price] 12 months for 75 dollars.”³⁰

It appears that Joshua Hilacheck wanted to be paid – unlike, perhaps, Winslow, who was willing, after many reasons why he might not want to, to trust the meeting because, at the monthly meeting of 7th month, 1st, 1837, the meeting united with the following minute: “This monthly meeting makes application to the quarterly meeting for assistance for the maintenance of Samuel Price an insane person a member of this meeting the Clerk is directed to furnish the quarterly meeting with a Copy of this minute.”³¹ A bit later, the Quarterly meeting (this is reported to the monthly meeting) suggested that Blue River Monthly Meeting, before they would act, should ask other monthly meetings in the Quarter for help.

²⁷Blue River mountain meeting 6th month 4th, 1836

²⁸ Blue River mountain meeting 6th month 4th, 1836

²⁹ Blue River mountain meeting 2th month 4th, 1837

³⁰ Blue River mountain meeting 4th month 1st, 1837

³¹ Blue river Mountain meeting 7th month, 1st, 1837

The Quarterly meeting responded, eventually, as follows: “Blue river quarterly meeting of friends held the 13th of the 7th month. 1837 Blue river monthly meeting applies to this [meeting for] assistance in the maintenance of samuel price (sic) an insane person which claiming the attention of this meeting resulted in recommending it to the notice of the monthly meetings to open free subscriptions for the purpose above named, forward the money they may raise to each quarter [] taken from the minutes of meeting aforesaid (sic) by Joshua Trueblood, Clerk.”³² In other words, the Quarterly Meeting agreed to ask the constituent monthly meetings to contribute to the cost of Price’s care, but only what each Meeting might gain from asking – there was still no assessment.

On the 2nd of 9th month, then, in 1837, a committee was set up to “open a subscription”³³ for Price. At this same meeting, one Elisha Hobbs, who had contracted to “keep”³⁴ the meeting house and keep fires in the stove was released from this task, which he had earlier offered as his share of the cost of caring for Price.

An extract of the minutes of Blue River Quarterly Meeting (held the 2nd of 2nd month, 1838) indicated that it had received a report from Blue River Monthly Meeting that it was trying to raise money for Price and was “requested” to forward it to the next quarterly meeting.³⁵ The monthly meeting had, until this point, been caring for Price for 15 years, and would continue to do so for another 30.

³² Blue River Mountain meeting 13th of 7th month, 1837

³³ Blue River Mountain meeting 2nd of 9th month, 1837

³⁴ Blue River Mountain meeting 2nd of 9th month, 1837

³⁵ Blue River mountain meeting 2nd of 2nd month, 1838

During the Monthly meeting held the 5th of 5th month, 1838, the meeting reported that it had received \$49.50 for the care of Price which it forwarded to the Quarterly Meeting with the proper committee appointed to do so.³⁶

While there is much more to report in terms of the constant notices in the minutes of the care of Price over the years, they tend to be more-or-less in the pattern already noted: that is, that the monthly meeting seems to have, somewhat grudgingly but responsibly, found a way to provide for the care of Samuel Price and has somehow managed to share the full responsibility with the Quarterly Meeting, though it is unclear from my research as to how large the Quarterly Meeting actually was. It's possible that Blue River Monthly Meeting was the largest group (it's not unknown to have in some situations monthly meetings reporting to quarterly meeting which are made up entirely of members of the monthly meeting), but it's also likely that there was a larger group now able to be called on to bear the price of Price's care. However, what seems to happen from that point in time is that the amount of money subscribed continues to decline, though slowly, over the years, reaching (for example) \$20.25 as reported in the minutes of the monthly meeting of the 3rd of 6th month, 1843.³⁷ The minutes of 3rd of 8th month, 1844 similarly report that they collected, for Price, \$24.50.³⁸ The minutes of the same meeting dutifully report that a committee assigned to raise money to help "people of color" raised nothing, by contrast. A year later (2nd of 8th month, 1845) the Price committee had reported raising \$23.65 while the committee to raise money for people of color concerns (as Indiana Yearly Meeting had directed) raised a total of seventy-five cents.³⁹

³⁶ Blue River Mountain meeting 5th of 5th month, 1838

³⁷ Blue River Mountain meeting 3rd of 6th month, 1843

³⁸ Blue River Mountain meeting 3rd of 8th month, 1844

³⁹ Blue River Mountain meeting 2nd of 8th month 1845

Clearly, the Friends of Blue River Monthly Meeting and of the Quarterly meeting felt an obligation to the member of their meeting that they did not feel toward people of color. Why this is so, is unclear, given the strictures of the book of discipline and the then-current and very much radical notion of Quakers regarding "Negroes and Slaves",⁴⁰ which included the idea that because of past slave ownership something might be due "those black people who have been held as slaves"⁴¹ and that even if there were no such obligation, the discipline still exhorts members to engage voluntarily in "training up their youth in such virtuous principles and habits as may render them useful and respectable members of the community".⁴²

The story of Samuel Price continues pretty much the same way, year after year. The end, for Samuel Price, came after 45 years of being a "charge" on the monthly and quarterly meetings, and after being under the care of endless committees and of being the subject of what seems to be miserly charity and a penny-pinching attitude that still manages to protrude unpleasantly, between the dry and official lines of the minutes of the monthly meeting. From the minutes of Blue River Monthly Meeting, the 2nd of 3rd month, 1867 we know that Samuel Price died the 22nd of 1st month, 1867 and that a committee was charged to raise the \$24.00 that was still owed for his care up to his death and to raise \$14.00 for his funeral expenses.⁴³ By the meeting of the 1st of 5th month a total of \$17.68 was reported raised and forwarded to the Quarterly Meeting⁴⁴; the fund raising seems to drag on to the 1st of 6th month where the meeting is reminded that \$9.22 is still needed on Price's behalf⁴⁵ and, finally, the meeting of the 1st of 9th

⁴⁰ Kuenning, *supra* note 2 at 289.

⁴¹ *Ibid* at 292.

⁴² *Ibid*.

⁴³ Blue River Mountain meeting 2nd of 3rd month 1867

⁴⁴ Blue River Mountain meeting 1st of 5th month 1867

⁴⁵ Blue River Mountain meeting 1st of 6th month 1867

month, 1867 reports that the committee charged with raising money for Price were able to raise a further eighty-five cents.⁴⁶

Discussion

Much of the interest in this case, from a disability perspective, stems from the opportunity this gives to examine how people otherwise known for what today might be called progressive or liberal ideals, dealt with disabilities and to use their experience as a lens through which to view our own. The contrast between the language of the book of discipline and the actual practice in the world is remarkable to us – but perhaps not to them. A few points are of note, however, with regard to this particular case. First, Samuel Price is the only person whose name and history is so clearly spelled out in the minutes of the Blue River meeting. There must have been others who received support from the meeting, but their names are not recorded. This lack of recording names is the expectation according to the Yearly Meeting discipline, which states that “it is desired that we may always guard against unnecessarily exposing the names or situations of our fellow-members”,⁴⁷ so it is strange that Samuel Price is so noted. There must have, in the minds of the Quakers of eastern Indiana, in the first half of the 19th century, been something about this case which either needed or allowed the naming of the individual affected. I would imagine that he was named because everyone knew his situation anyhow and perhaps because it might have been felt that naming him might have an effect on the degree and amount of contributions – people might dig deeper for one of their own than for some other cause, however worthy. In any case, he is named and provides a focus for further discussion and research. At no time during the discussion of the care for and about of Price is there any indication that he has relatives or friends

⁴⁶ Blue River Mountain meeting 1st of 9th month 1867

⁴⁷Kuenning, *supra* note 2 at 302.

among the Quakers of the area, nor is there any hint that he might be expected to or allowed to be part of making decisions about what happens to him. Since the early extracts of the minutes note that some are willing to care for him only if he gets no worse, it's likely that Price was pretty seriously impaired. On the other hand, after the early days it seems that he must be managing well enough to stay in the community, though later research is needed to see if there is any more specificity as to the nature and type of the care.

General Changes During the Life of Samuel Price

We see the Quakers of Blue River Monthly meeting change from fairly rough, frontier types, in the 1820s, into cosmopolitan and sophisticated and politically important, nationally, Quakers of Indiana Yearly meeting, by the time of the Civil War and the clerkship of Charles Coffin, who left an interesting (and self-serving) typescript autobiography, found in the archives of Earlham College, along with some other papers which were apparently added to the Coffin collection to add balance. Coffin presents himself and his family as cultured and sophisticated Friends, and comments on visits he made to England, the Holy Land and other sites, dropping names and otherwise making clear to the reader that he was on good terms with important Friends, especially those in England, where London Yearly Meeting was still seen as the premier Yearly Meeting in the Quaker world. However, it is his revealing discussion about his visit to Washington DC early in "The War of the Rebellion",⁴⁸ as clerk of Indiana Yearly Meeting, that demonstrates how far the Quakers of Indiana had come from their earlier frontier roots and uncompromising insistence that members live the values of the organization they professed or be disowned. Coffin reports discussions he had with (successively) Abraham Lincoln and Secretary of War Stanton about what would happen to young Quaker men, when the military draft was

⁴⁸ Charles Coffin typescript autobiography, Earlham College Archives.

instituted during the Civil War. Lincoln, Coffin says, assured him that he respected Quaker beliefs and would act in such a way as to demonstrate his understanding of and respect for the religious beliefs of the Friends. It was left to Stanton, apparently, to interpret the vague but politically satisfactory answer of Lincoln: no Friend, Stanton assured Coffin, who was "really" conscientious about bearing a testimony against military service would be drafted but, Stanton made clear to Coffin, there were many young Friends who were known to be not "really" conscientious and those, he warned, should be expected to be drafted and to serve in the military. Coffin, his relief evident in his writings, provides the point in time when, in American Quakerism at least, the ideal of pacifism was given up because, he says, Stanton's words were ones "to which we [meaning Indiana Yearly Meeting Quakers] readily assented." (p. 47).⁴⁹

Finally, I was able to find the obituary of Rhoda Coffin, Charles Coffin's widow, in the New Castle, Indiana "The Daily Times" for October 29, 1909. She was reported as having just died in Chicago a few weeks before at the age of 83. During her life, the first half of which was in Richmond, Indiana, there is little to be said. However, from the time of the Civil War (the newspaper refers to it as "the war between the states") when she established a home for "friendless women" inspired by, we are told, the "sufferings of the families of the soldiers who were engaged in the war"; she established a school for the care of children with no caretakers of "vicious parents"; she tried to reorganize the management of the insane asylums within the state on the cottage system. She was instrumental in the establishment of the Girl's reform school and Women's Prison, which was "The first one of its kind in the world managed and officered wholly by women." During her entire 83 years, half of which overlapped with Samuel Price's life, she was, the obituary noted, "a strong believer in the right of woman to carve out her own

⁴⁹ Charles Coffin typescript autobiography, Earlham College Archives.

life, and preached and labored after she became an acknowledged minister in the Society of Friends, to give women the opportunity to become lawyers, doctors and professors, which fields were at that time, largely denied them, and she also strongly advocated the right of women to vote in all matters involving education and taxation."⁵⁰

So: the Quakers of this part of Indiana were considered not only successful but progressive, early defenders of the rights of women, and yet were not so when it comes to disability.

Discussion

The minute books of a Quaker meeting at the time studied are framed in ways that are difficult to understand for those who have not experienced the Quaker form of conducting business.

Conceptually and officially, such meetings are often referred to as meetings for worship with attention to business – that is, as formal meetings to worship with the clear understanding that a rightly guided meeting of this sort will come to an understanding of God’s will regarding even the smallest item of business, let alone a continuing responsibility of the sort occasioned by Samuel Price’s life. The earliest Quakers did not differentiate business and worship, but fairly early in the development of the Society of Friends in the British Isles, it was found essential to separate the two, though only so far as necessary. In addition, there were two meetings for business in every Quaker meeting: one made up of the women Friends and one of men Friends. The men Friends were the final word for handling business in those days, but the existence of the women’s meeting meant that women were getting experience and practice in organizational skills. Since the two meetings consisted mostly of people married to or related to each other, it

⁵⁰ Obituary, "The late Rhoda M. Coffin," *The Daily Times*, New Castle IN, October 29, 1909.

always was important for the men to take care that the women's voices were not ignored or devalued.

However, as with other practices and conventions that arose in the unwritten "constitution" of the meetings, the phrasing of minutes was designed to let the insiders know what was going on without being too explicit – what was mentioned in the minutes of a monthly meeting today might come back to haunt a family relationship years or even decades later. (cite Quaker reader here). In addition, a frank discussion (especially where supporting a meeting member financially might be concerned) could be moved to a committee of weighty (i.e., influential) Friends with a request for action but the committee report could be very simply reported without the need for detail. Hence, if a committee asks for permission to be "continued" it means that they could not decide what they were asked to decide and need more time. If the committee asks to be "released" that means that they can't agree or feel they have completed their work. In the case of Samuel Price, the request for a member to acknowledge, by signing a statement in the minutes, that he had been paid for his effort, suggests to the author that there might have been some dispute between the meeting and the individual involved, settled by an unusually formal method.

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