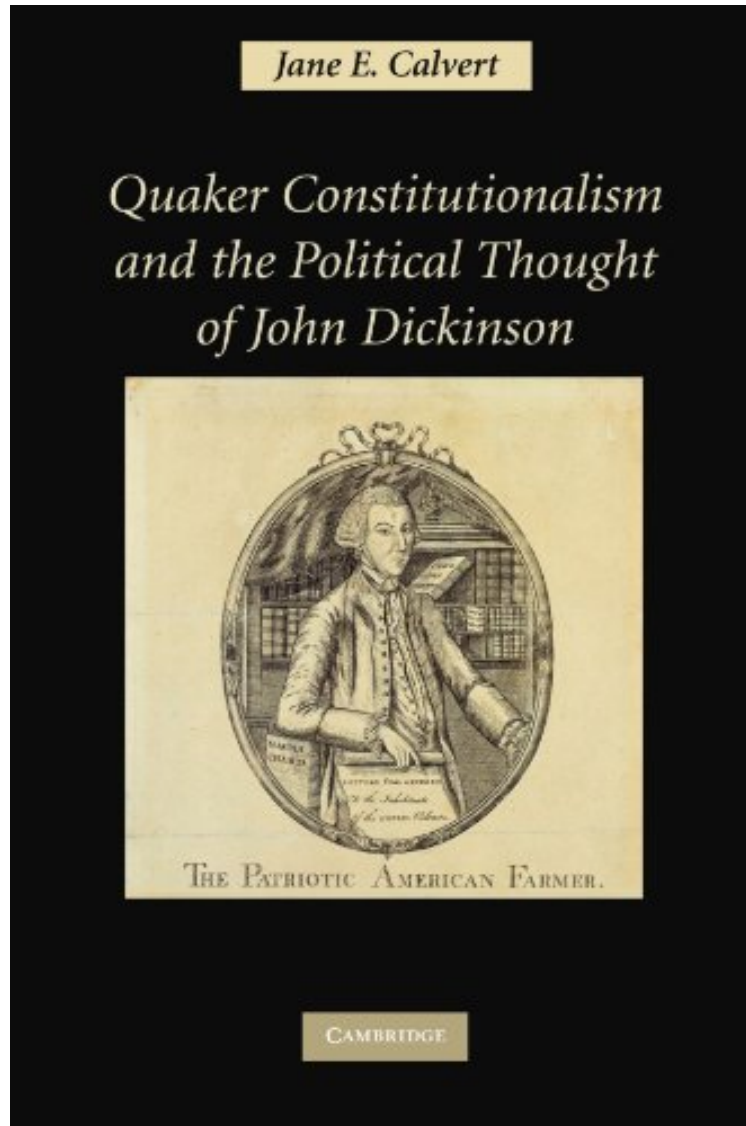


Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John Dickinson

Jane E. Calvert

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Jane E. Calvert : Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John Dickinson before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John Dickinson:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A terrific read for anyone interested in Quaker history or the ...By Angela Catron A terrific read for anyone interested in Quaker history or the political contributions of John Dickinson.

The author offers a unique perspective on how Quaker theology and politics influenced America's founding documents. I would highly recommend this title for any avid reader's bookshelf. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Informative, but not suited to the casual reader. By Jacqueline M Scharer An excellent resource but not for the faint of heart. Definitely thickly written so sometimes it feels as though you are treading water. But, interesting nonetheless, and a keeper. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Interesting Book; Good Contribution By Learning New Ways I found this book fascinating. About 25% of my ancestry is Quakers from Pennsylvania and New Jersey in the Colonial era and so their cultural legacy still had some life in it even into the 20th Century in my family. With this background as well as other books I've read on colonial Philadelphia history, such as "Not All Wives: Women of Colonial Philadelphia" and "Quakers and the American Family" and also being a lawyer who has studied and worked with the Constitution, I found many of the assertions of this book to be true. I think that the populations of this region were serious-minded, hard-working, loathed violence and unmanaged lust, hated feudalism and religious privilege, respected flexible authority, hated authoritarianism, and had a concept of child-nurture (by both parents) and child development. I think that the author overstates the difficulty women in the early Quaker meeting in England had with speaking from personal authority, however, as I think daughters in this culture were raised with a stronger sense of self and were expected, or even required, to have their own opinions. New female members may have found this adjustment challenging but I think there were probably at least some women long accustomed to it. This is what surprised me a little about the book; the author's claim that these views were entirely based in religion and had a "great man" focus, like on John Dickinson or Martin Luther King. I think that it is more cultural in origin, and I think they were suspicious of "great men"; it's likely not a coincidence that John Dickinson is the founding father "no one has heard of". The early Quakers were people from a region in England, the north Midlands, that had resisted the Norman Conquest. They may have looked different enough physically that they were an oppressed ethnic group. Their cultural values were not the Catholic views institutionalized in the Norman Conquest. The Norman Conquest was based in French Roman Catholicism and the the Scandinavians of the North Midlands were well-equipped to resist it since it was their own country people, the Norse, who had adopted the culture of French Catholicism who sought to control England in the Conquest. It is like seeing your brother after he has left home and learned some new ideas; if you think these ideas are bunk you can say that to him better than someone who doesn't have common history with him. In any event, the choice Dickinson apparently made as one of the central drafters of the Articles of Confederation and the early draft of its conversion into the Constitution to build the document around a concept of "Person", rather than "Man" as was used in the Declaration of Independence or in the contemporaneously drafted French Constitution is very interesting and seems to reflect this cultural background and humility combined with thoughtful foresight and legal skill. This framing by Dickinson likely also derives from the 1689 English Bill of Rights, which also uses only the term "Person" not "Man"; the colonial Delaware Valley (where the land was purchased from the Lenape) provided leverage for documentation of the 1689 Bill of Rights in connection with deposition of the last Catholic monarch. The culture of the Quakers was one where men and women were seen as separate people even within marriage, women were expected to be rational and were leaders often in ways that were on a par with men, both men and women nurtured children, women could pass personal property to children, etc. These all were somewhat at odds with the common laws of England that had been modified in the French Norman Conquest, such as the laws of coverture where a femme sole (or single woman) retained her right to own property and hold the status of a man, but a femme covert (or married woman) had to give all her property to her husband and had no rights. Consistent with the Quaker alternative to this common law view, women in New Jersey could vote in the early years of the US, provided that they could meet the property requirement. While a lot of the common law of coverture (and similar Napoleonic code laws of head-and-master marriage) did get imported to the US and the Quakers were trying to function in this world of these laws, they didn't seem to agree with them. Dickinson's use of the term "Person" therefor seems to me to reflect a view that for the country to succeed, men and women needed to see themselves as Persons first and their gender second. It seems to reflect a hope that the oppression of the French common law and Napoleonic code could be repealed over time. And, in fact, it was. The last coverture laws were repealed in the late 1800s and the last head-and-master law was repealed in 1970.

In the late-seventeenth century, Quakers originated a unique strain of constitutionalism, based on their theology and ecclesiology, which emphasized constitutional perpetuity and radical change through popular peaceful protest. While Whigs could imagine no other means of drastic constitutional reform except revolution, Quakers denied this as a legitimate option to governmental abuse of authority and advocated instead civil disobedience. This theory of a perpetual yet amendable constitution and its concomitant idea of popular sovereignty are things that most scholars believe did not exist until the American Founding. The most notable advocate of this theory was Founding Father John Dickinson, champion of American rights, but not revolution. His thought and action have been misunderstood until now, when they are placed within the Quaker tradition. This theory of Quaker constitutionalism can be traced in a clear and direct line from early Quakers through Dickinson to Martin Luther King, Jr.

"In exploring Dickinson, Quaker theology, Revolutionary political thought, and the relationships between them, Calvert has invited us into fresh territory, and she has done so with graceful style." -Emma Lapsansky-Werner, *Journal of Law Religion*"Jane E. Calvert's book is the culmination, to date, of that collective effort [to take Quakers seriously], the keystone in an arch of scholarly writings that opens the way to a thoughtful and stimulating reconsideration of Quakerism. ...This is a scholarly accomplishment of note and it will, I hope, generate some restating of revolutionary history." -Alan Tully, *American Historical*"The volume is well organized, leading the reader progressively through sections on Quakerism in general..." -Stuart B. Jennings, *Church History*"In a provocative monograph, historian Jane E. Calvert puts the Quakers and John Dickinson back into the story of America's constitutional founding and American political history writ large." -Kyle G. Volk, *Journal of the Early Republic*"Calvert's reassessment of John Dickinson's role in the revolutionary and founding era of the United States is so much more than another 'founding father' biography. It is instead one of the most thorough treatments of American Quakerism in general and Quaker politics and resistance in particular. ...[H]er book is essential reading to anyone interested in American reform in general, as well as the history of civil disobedience theories." -Beverly C. Tomek, *Pennsylvania History*"In a clearly argued and well researched thesis, Professor Calvert contributes greatly to the discussion [of Quaker reform] by compiling a synthesis of previous research and her own unique findings. The conclusions, though clearly developed, are not without controversy, but any future discussion will have to address many of the issues she had clearly articulated and for that we can only be grateful." -Stuart B. Jennings, *Church History*"In a provocative monograph, historian Jane E. Calvert puts the Quakers and John Dickinson back into the story of America's constitutional founding and American political history writ large. Challenging readers to shelve preconceptions of Quakers as apolitical quietists, Calvert convincingly shows Quakers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries pioneering a then unique tradition of constitutional thought and political action....[C]onstitutional and political historians should join scholars of Quakers and colonial and revolutionary Pennsylvania in wrestling with Calvert's bold claims about the Quaker influence on American popular sovereignty." -Kyle G. Volk, *Journal of the Early Republic*"Jane E. Calvert's study is narrow and deep, showing the relationship between religion and politics within an examination of Pennsylvania Quakers and their intellectual influence on Founder John Dickinson." -Ellen Holmes Pearson, *William and Mary Quarterly*